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The Nation.

WHY OBAMA SHOULD GO TO JERUSALEM

KAI BIRD

ALSO: ADAM HOROWITZ & PHILIP WEISS ON THE BOYCOTT DIVESTMENT SANCTIONS MOVEMENT

JUNE 28, 2010
TheNation.com

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Letters

Seize the Radical Moment

Brandon, Fla.

Re Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian's "America's Radical Roots" [May 31]: I understand that progressive social programs had their roots in radicalism. However, it is difficult to be overly enthusiastic about what this means in today's America.

In the 1930s we had the New Deal and a strong feeling of radicalism and class identity among the working class. The influence of unions and their effect on government was much different. "Socialism" was not a bad word. In the '60s Jim Crow was viewed (at least by the sane) as a system so outdated that radical change had to come.

Fast-forward to today. Any radicalism is pre-empted by right-wing media, particularly Fox, corporate-backed network news and AM talk-radio. There is virtually no advocacy or reporting of anything radical or progressive. Combine this with the disproportionate coverage of Tea Party rantings at "town hall" meetings, and public opinion has been swayed rightward.

The authors say they wish to "bring about a more charitable perception of radicalism." They provide past examples: the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, public education. But it is difficult for this longtime *Nation* reader to feel their optimism or to hope that we, as a nation, will be radicalized again anytime soon. Only a monumental event could spark radical action.

The "radicalism" of today is this new wave of right-wing Tea Partyers financed by Astroturfers—the wealthy and corporations. They had their monumental event—the election of an African-American president. *That* rallied their masses.

Unfortunately we on the left have not rallied our masses to push this president to take up progressive causes, as radicals did in FDR's time, when they made him promote their agenda. Will we progressives have our monumental event? And will it be enough to rally our masses? I hope our country survives until then.

Bill Falcone

letters@thenation.com

Coming Soon to a Shelter Near You

Cincinnati

Katha Pollitt asks "What Ever Happened to Welfare Mothers?" [May 31]. Nearly uncountable numbers of poor families double or triple up with friends or relatives or are stranded in shelters for homeless families. If the "welfare mothers" have not lost their children to foster care (so are no longer "families"), and if they have "maxed out" the lifetime PRWORA [Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996] benefits that accompanied the low-paid jobs that enabled them to meet the work requirement, homeless shelters are lifesaving.

These families are now joined in the shelters by those whose landlords' mortgages have been foreclosed. Tenants typically don't know of the foreclosure until a utility company arrives to cut off service or a bank rep comes to "secure" the property. The low-paid jobs "welfare mothers" may have found in the early days of PRWORA have vanished, many to unemployed workers who move back to parents' basements when their unemployment benefits are exhausted.

If things proceed as they did in the 1980s, when the masses of Ronald Reagan's "new poor" exploded, we can next expect the "basement dwellers," followed by people from suburbia with foreclosures of their own. They will compete for precious shelter beds with the post-PRWORA families stranded for lack of affordable housing. The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing programs funded by the Recovery Act bring promise if—a big if—rents can match the very low wages of post-PRWORA families.

Alice Skirtz, *casework supervisor*
Family Shelter Partnership

'Race' to the Top?

Chicago

I was amused by the letters in the May 31 issue praising Obama for labeling himself "black" on the Census form. I don't care *what* color he chooses to call him-

(continued on page 24)

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Job Number 1—Jobs

When it comes to the economy it sometimes feels like all of Washington—from President Obama to members of Congress to the brains at Treasury—is stuck in an episode of *Lost*. Theirs is an alternate reality where the indicators all point up and the recovery is so robust that it's time to cut spending. In this parallel universe "our economy is getting stronger by the day"; that's what President Obama said when the Labor Department released its May jobs figures. But for the 15 million unemployed Americans hunting for jobs that don't exist, this is simply not the case, and it's not, in fact, what the numbers indicate either.

EDITORIAL

Yes, the president's recovery plan successfully stopped the economic free fall he inherited. But it's becoming increasingly clear that even with the stimulus, the labor market is in the midst of an L-shaped recession. In May the economy added 431,000 jobs, but more than 95 percent of them were temporary Census positions. At only 41,000 new jobs, the private sector barely grew at all, and at a much slower rate than the 100,000 jobs per month economists say are needed just to keep up with new workers entering the job market (sorry, college grads!).

The hole is deep. According to the Economic Policy Institute, even if employment grew at the rate it did at the height of the '90s boom (2.6 percent annually), we wouldn't see pre-2008 levels of employment until January 2015, in the middle of Obama's second term—if he has one. Every moment the president spends in denial of the problem jeopardizes his chances for re-election. And it looks as if the situation will only get worse; stimulus spending is now peaking, and brutal cuts at the state and local levels are already negating its effects. Zombie banks still aren't doing much lending, and no one knows how far the economic turmoil in Europe will spread.

New action by Congress to create jobs is more than justified. But standing in the way is the increasingly loud conversation about the coming debt crisis, championed by the president's bipartisan deficit commission, stacked with deficit hawks and amplified by the mass media, which uncritically ring the deficit alarm bells.

But deficits, for all the scare stories, are not an immediate emergency. We still need to put people to work. And we should be prepared to see deficits increase in the short term in the interest of creating jobs that will sustain the economy in the long term. Voters understand this—74 percent think Congress should put benefits and health coverage for unemployed workers ahead of deficit reduction. The Fed's Ben Bernanke does too; he told Congress on June 9 that now is not the time to cut spending and that the economy "may need more assistance."

In December, the House passed a $150 billion jobs bill, but it can't get a hearing in the Senate. This year, Representative George Miller introduced a $100 billion bill for state, local and public service hiring; it hasn't gotten a vote in the House. Even an extension of unemployment insurance and healthcare protection faces conservative obstruction. There are signs that the administration is rousing from its slumber; the president is reportedly lobbying the Senate on the jobs front. But it has yet to put forth a proposal as robust as is necessary. The AFL-CIO, for example, has a $400 billion jobs plan financed by a financial-speculation tax and a tax on banks. That, at least, would send the bill for the crisis to those who caused it.

A new jobs bill is morally right, politically savvy and smart economics. If Democrats can't see this, then come November they really could be lost.

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The Money Primary

It is not 1896, but Americans can be forgiven during this edgiest of primary seasons if they imagine they've been ricocheted back to the days when William Jennings Bryan was waging electoral war with the robber barons. The two key themes of the June 8 primaries, which saw a dozen states choose candidates on the year's busiest voting day so far, were plutocracy and populism.

COMMENT

In California the plutocrats won by clogging the arteries of democracy with money. Californians don't actually like former eBay CEO Meg Whitman. Only 24 percent of voters view the corporate insider favorably, according to a new Public Policy Polling survey. Yet Whitman swept a supposedly competitive Republican primary for governor by spending at least $71 million of her own money ($70 a vote) to make her rich-but-not-quite-Meg-Whitman-rich opponent, Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner, even less liked. In the GOP Senate primary, former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, whose favorable rating is lower than Whitman's, primed the pump with enough of her own money to beat more experienced candidates like Congressman Tom Campbell.

California wasn't the only place where money made itself heard on June 8. The Arkansas Democratic Senate runoff between centrist incumbent Blanche Lincoln and challenger Bill Halter, who was backed by organized labor, saw unprecedented spending by the candidates and interest groups on both sides, much of it negative. And Republican contests for the Senate in Nevada and the governorship in South Carolina were pricey and mean-spirited. But if money was talking elsewhere, in the nation's most populous state it shouted. Candidates with big bankrolls prevailed on both sides of the partisan aisle, and they often won ugly—as in the Los Angeles area, where conservative Democratic Congresswoman Jane Harman, the second-wealthiest House member, savaged progressive challenger Marcy Winograd with television ads and mailings that painted Winograd's advocacy for Middle East peacemaking as a threat to Israel. In a race between two Jewish women in a district with a large Jewish population, the negative messaging, combined with a big budget, helped Harman secure a 58-to-41 win.

Particularly unsettling about this year's surge in big-budget campaigning is that it comes as the Supreme Court is busily deconstructing not just limits on corporate and special-interest spending, with the *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling, but the underpinnings of existing public-financing laws. The High Court just barred the distribution of matching funds to candidates participating in Arizona's public campaign finance system. Chief Justice John Roberts and his judicial-activist majority did not shut the system down formally, although there is reason to believe that it is their ultimate intent to strike from the statute books all constraints on the influence of big money over state and national politics. The immediate effect of the Arizona ruling was to clear the way in that state for wealthy candidates to do what Whitman did in California: drown opponents who don't happen to be billionaires in a sea

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Noted.

ARKANSAS HITS AND MISSES: In the marquee primary matchup of June 8, **Blanche Lincoln** defeated **Bill Halter**, proving that incumbency still has its perks. But it wasn't all bad news for progressives. In the state's 2nd Congressional District, which encompasses Little Rock and seven surrounding counties in central Arkansas, State Senator **Joyce Elliott**, an outspoken progressive who is running to become the first African-American candidate elected to Congress or statewide office in the state, defeated good ol' boy **Robbie Wills**. Wills, speaker of the Arkansas House, opposed Obama's healthcare bill and ran hard to Elliott's right in the final weeks of the race, distributing a controversial mailer claiming that Elliott wants to "restrict gun rights," "outlaw prayer in schools," and promote "extreme abortion views." Even conservative bloggers condemned the ad, which helped rally Elliott's base in Little Rock. She'll now face Karl Rove protégé **Tim Griffin**, a key figure in the 2006 Attorneygate scandal, in the general election.

Meanwhile, in northeast Arkansas's 1st District, boyish Congressional staffer **Chad Causey**—who worked for retiring Representative **Marion Berry**—defeated über-conservative Democrat **Tim Wooldridge**, who once introduced a bill in the state legislature to reinstate public hangings, earning him the nickname "Hang 'em High" Tim.

As for Halter, the peculiarities of Arkansas politics explain his loss better than an alleged broader failure by the progressive groups that rallied to his side. Core Democrats and liberal Obama voters, to the extent that they exist in the state, stuck with Lincoln out of loyalty and never took a liking to Halter, who they viewed as icy and overly ambitious. The loss will certainly sting, but it's more like a missed opportunity than a crushing defeat for progressives. The next time they have to organize in a red state like Arkansas, they'll do better. Elliott's race would be a good place to continue the job. ARI BERMAN

IN BED WITH BIG BIZ: A sex scandal again threw South Carolina's governorship into turmoil over the past few weeks, this time with accusations of infidelity against Republican candidate **Nikki Haley**. In the weeks before her party's primary, in which Haley finished first but without the outright majority that would have avoided a runoff, two men claimed to have had "inappropriate" relations with the state representative. Haley said it wasn't true and even offered to resign should anyone produce evidence to the contrary.

The real scandal, however, is where one of the alleged flings took place: at a 2008 meeting of the **American Legislative Exchange Council**, a conservative front group for the nation's largest corporations. In the months after Haley attended the ALEC conference, the corporate-funded group wrote her a $1,600 check to cover her expenses. Since then, she has co-sponsored ALEC-backed bills aiming to block healthcare reform and helped pass a resolution decrying EPA regulation of greenhouse gases.

She summarizes her economic policy as pushing tort reform, tax reform and workers' compensation reform. "We need to pass business-friendly legislation," she says in a video on her campaign website. "We're a right-to-work state: we keep the unions out; we need to stay that way." The cries of infidelity may be baseless, but she's sure in bed with big business. NICHOLAS KUSNETZ

THOMAS'S LEGACY: It may well be that the most remarkable thing about the long and accomplished career of White House correspondent **Helen Thomas** was that, at 89, she remained so fierce and focused an interrogator that the most disreputable players in American political life made it their business to force her out of the press room.

Thomas didn't help her cause. Responding to an ambush interview question with a bumbling attempt to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, she suggested that Israeli Jews should "go home" to Germany, Poland and America. Thomas recognized immediately that it was a crude and irresponsible remark; she issued an apology that reaffirmed her longstanding support for a just and equitable Middle East peace. But that was not enough for **Ari Fleischer**, the former Bush/Cheney White House spokesman who so frequently clashed with Thomas in the run-up to the Iraq War.

Virtually alone among senior correspondents at that time, Thomas refused to act as Fleischer's stenographer. The barrier-breaking female journalist who had held presidents and their aides to account since the Eisenhower years demanded facts, not fantasies. Fleischer couldn't stand the heat and went out of his way to isolate and diminish Thomas. But she remained after he fled the White House, even penning a powerful criticism of official deceit and a pliant press corps: *Watchdogs of Democracy? The Waning Washington Press Corps and How It Has Failed the Public* (Lisa Drew/Scribner, 2006).

When Thomas handed him an opening with her remarks about Israel, however, Fleischer began campaigning for her firing. On June 7 she retired in what was by any measure a sad end to a storied career. But even if Fleischer won the last fight, the correspondent will be far better remembered than the flack. History will record that while she could be indelicate, and in the end even offensive, Thomas believed in and often made brilliant use of the First Amendment as the tool the founders intended: a check and balance on abuses by the powerful—and by their shameless spokesmen. JOHN NICHOLS

KUDOS TO KATRINA: Each year, **Exceptional Women in Publishing** gives its highest award to a woman who embodies its mission—to educate and empower women in publishing and through publishing. Past awards have gone to pioneers like *Ms. Magazine*'s **Gloria Steinem** and *Newsweek*'s **Eleanor Clift**. We at *The Nation* are delighted that our fearless leader, **Katrina vanden Heuvel**, joins that list this year. At the awards presentation, held at the **2010 Folio Show**, vanden Heuvel discussed how *The Nation* strives to "embrace the changes roiling our industry and still stay true to the values that have kept us strong for 145 years." It's a challenge, she noted, that is particularly relevant online—where we've relaunched our website and built up our online communities, all under a crackerjack team led by women editors and web producers. We've even embraced Twitter—**@katrinanation** especially!

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of negative campaigning. Another impact could be to make reformers think there is no way to write fair election laws—an inclination that must be guarded against, as Common Cause president Bob Edgar notes, with a savvy reminder that the federal Fair Elections Now Act "is carefully crafted to pass constitutional muster even in light of the Roberts Court's U-turn toward campaign finance deregulation." That said, the extent to which big money muscled the process on June 8 and the clear indications that the Supreme Court will keep meddling strengthens the case for amending the Constitution in a manner that assures that elections do not become the province merely of retired CEOs and corporate Cassandras.

Despite what happened in California and several other states, the process is not entirely lost. Where candidates were reasonably equally matched financially and had to win on the strength of their messages, the voting provided more reminders that Americans are ready to crack down on Wall Street. That was clear in Arkansas, where Halter's populist challenge to Lincoln forced the senior senator to reposition herself as a populist. Lincoln's final ads had the senator talking about how she's "taking on Wall Street with the toughest reform bill of anyone in either party." And in fact, Lincoln did insert provisions into the financial services reform bill that would force big banks to erect firewalls between Main Street consumer operations and speculative ones on Wall Street. So, while Halter and his union backers lost a primary, they may have won a war by forcing Lincoln to remake herself and banking regulations.

They did something else as well. Unions that put feet on the ground in Arkansas turned out Democratic votes for former high school teacher and union leader Joyce Elliott, a runoff winner who is positioned to become the state's first African-American Congress member and a progressive voice in the House. Maine State Senate president Libby Mitchell, a clean-money campaigner who emphasized populist economics and a commitment to marriage equality, was nominated for governor, while former US Attorney Roxanne Conlin secured the Democratic nod to mount a "make them accountable" challenge to Iowa Republican Senator Chuck Grassley—a reminder that Democratic incumbents aren't the only ones vulnerable to a throw-the-bums-out message.

Of course, the Tea Party movement is still stirring the pot in GOP primaries, and gaining more than its fair share of headlines—even as its favored contenders lost high-profile races in states from California to Virginia. The real story is that there's been at least as much "angry with Washington" voting on the Democratic side of primary ballots. Sometimes candidates with time-for-a-change messages win outright, as with Conlin in Iowa; sometimes they win on the issues, forcing DC veterans like Lincoln to change their tune. But the story of the 2010 campaign could be written as much, or more, by genuine economic populists on the left as by the faux Tea Partisans on the right—so long as the real reformers can make themselves heard above the noise made by all that big money.

JOHN NICHOLS

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Obama's Temper

His calm, say the pundits, is not the right mode.
To look like a leader he'll have to explode.
The man has to demonstrate more of an id.
For that there is nothing like flipping your lid.
That's right: what they say is to get Big Mo back
Obama should contemplate blowing his stack.
According to them, what could help him the most'll
Be some sort of sign that he's finally gone postal.

BP: Beyond Punishment

"I think it's part of this sort of blame-game society in the sense that it's always got to be somebody's fault instead of the fact that maybe sometimes accidents happen."

—Rand Paul, on Good Morning America
speaking about the BP oil spill

Capitolism

Of all the crazy-ass things Rand Paul has said during his brief, disastrous turn in the national spotlight, this is the most insidious. A week after Paul's comment, David Brooks made the same point a touch more artfully, chalking up the disaster to "the bloody crossroads where complex technical systems meet human psychology," the inevitable result of "living in an imponderably complex technical society."

Society must have seemed "imponderably complex" to those living through the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire, but luckily for us, activists of the day refused to simply say, "Shit happens" and move on.

Pace Paul and Brooks, the public wants to see BP held accountable, and with good reason: early indications are that the company is guilty of a host of mortal sins—from ignoring repeated internal warnings about its safety procedures to harassing workers who raised safety concerns. According to reports from the *Guardian* and NPR, after the fatal explosion BP sequestered the surviving workers at sea, refusing to let them contact their loved ones, and bullied them into signing forms that indemnified BP for the accident.

After some initial foot-dragging, the Obama administration finally seems to understand that justice demands an aggressive stance. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Justice Department is opening a criminal probe into the accident, which claimed the lives of eleven workers; then the White House came out in favor of a bill that would raise the $75 million liability cap on damages from the spill under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. And, of course, President Obama famously told Matt Lauer that he's trying to figure

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out "whose ass to kick."

That's all well and good. But despite the public outrage at BP and the thirst for justice from the battered residents of the Gulf Coast, there's a decent chance BP will, like Exxon before it, escape fairly unscathed. The reason is the legal and social shift in how we approach punishment for powerful corporations—a shift that contrasts sharply with the trends in punishment for citizens, particularly those without money or power.

First, let's look at corporate accountability. Ideally, this is the kind of thing you'd want the government to pursue, but as has been dramatically demonstrated, the state's regulatory apparatus has, in many areas, been gutted or co-opted. Which leaves it primarily to private parties to pursue accountability through the courts. In tort law, damages are divided into two types: compensatory and punitive. The former are designed to compensate victims of negligence for their economic damages: lost income, property destruction, etc. Punitive damages are awarded above these compensatory costs as a means of, well, punishing the wrongdoer.

For a long time, conservatives and big corporations have hated punitive damages. The amounts are decided by juries, who have a tendency, when faced with stories of corporate malfeasance, to stick it to the bastards. In the 1980s conservatives began a legal assault on punitive damages, in "an effort coordinated very closely with the Chamber of Commerce," says Stanford law professor Jeff Fisher. "The first few fits and starts didn't work, but they kept hammering away."

In the 1990s enemies of punitive damages found the perfect case when an Alabama doctor sued BMW for having sold him a repainted new car without disclosing the repainting to him; a jury awarded him $4,000 in compensatory damages and $4 million in punitive damages. The Supreme Court found that the punitive damages violated the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; but it didn't specify guidelines for the level of punitive damages that would run afoul of the Constitution.

Which brings us to the last catastrophic American oil spill: the 1989 Exxon *Valdez* disaster. Five years after the spill, an Alaska jury found Exxon guilty of reckless disregard for allowing a drunken sailor to steer its ship. Exxon paid $507 million in compensatory damages, and the jury assessed it $5 billion in punitive damages.

After several rounds of appeals, the courts cut that award in half. In 2008 the Supreme Court invalidated the award, stating that in the Exxon case, no more than a 1:1 ratio between compensatory damages and punitive damages was allowable. As Senator Patrick Leahy pointed out at a recent Judiciary Committee hearing on liability caps, the decision profoundly altered the incentives faced by firms like BP: "It reduced the consequences of their misconduct to a discounted cost of doing business. That's almost like saying, 'We're giving you a green light to do whatever you want to do.' I can't imagine why anyone would be surprised that…oil companies cut corners and compromised safety." (Leahy's colleague Sheldon Whitehouse has introduced a bill that would overturn the 1:1 cap for maritime law.)

Aside from the practical consequences of altering the incentive structure, the Exxon case and other statutory caps on liability present a deeper threat to the American moral fabric. Set against the increasingly punitive posture of the state toward its citizens over the past several decades, the arbitrary limits on punishment available to a party like Exxon make a mockery of equal justice under the law. Our criminal justice system is the most punitive of any industrialized democracy. We have 2.3 million people incarcerated, half of them for nonviolent property and drug offenses. At least two dozen states have three-strikes laws, and in some cases citizens can face life imprisonment for minor nonviolent offenses. In 2003 the Supreme Court upheld a fifty-year sentence for a California man caught stealing videotapes.

And things are even harsher for Americans unlucky enough to need succor from the state to survive, *aka* poor people. Just one drug-related felony conviction can get you booted from welfare, or from public housing (though if you own a house, the IRS will still allow you your mortgage-interest deduction). Under federal law, a drug bust disqualifies a college student from all federal student aid. As a result, between 2001 and 2006 almost 200,000 students lost access to aid. The greatest Congressional champion of this unforgiving policy was Mark Souder, the Indiana Republican who resigned after revelations of his affair with a staff member. In his farewell speech, he took solace in the possibility of forgiveness.

A punitive society is not the best kind of society: there's a real virtue in forgiveness, in second chances. But for years we've been applying Rand Paul's "accidents happen" principle to those at the top while heaping blame, scorn and draconian punishment on those at the bottom. Punitive damages are capped for corporations, while punitive policies proliferate for citizens. This tears the social contract apart, and the only way to repair it is to apply the same principles of accountability up and down the social hierarchy. We should start with BP.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Next Week in Jerusalem?

COMMENT

President Obama must go to Jerusalem next week. Seriously. He needs to go to Jerusalem in the same fashion as Egypt's Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977. He needs to use his presidential prestige and unique oratorical gifts to impose a dramatic new paradigm on a Middle East mired in a dangerous stalemate. I write this knowing full well that America has no viable partners in a "peace process" that is going nowhere. All the players on the ground are politically weak and perceive the status quo as less risky than the prospect of making the necessary compromises everyone knows are necessary. But that is precisely why the only realistic policy at hand is one that requires a game-changing, high-profile initiative from the Obama administration.

The president's Middle East advisers—the usual suspects include men like Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk—are no doubt urging caution, arguing that any forceful American diplomacy is bound to end in failure. They are the failed realists. Aaron

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David Miller, another perennial Middle East adviser to both Republican and Democratic administrations since 1978, recently confessed that he was "no longer a believer." In a *Foreign Policy* essay titled "The False Religion of Mideast Peace," Miller explains that believing in "Arab-Israeli peacemaking" is pretty much like tilting at windmills. He virtually confesses that his career as a diplomat over the past three decades was a futile exercise drenched in delusions. Miller now thinks America can essentially do nothing to end the region's endless series of tribal wars. At the end of his essay he writes, "Right now, America has neither the opportunity nor frankly the balls to do truly big things on Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Fortuna might still rescue the president. The mullahcracy in Tehran might implode. The Syrians and Israelis might reach out to one another secretly, or perhaps a violent confrontation will flare up to break the impasse. But without a tectonic plate shifting somewhere, it's going to be tough to re-create the good old days when bold and heroic Arab and Israeli leaders strode the stage of history, together with Americans, willing and able to do serious peacemaking."

But a "tectonic plate shifting somewhere" is precisely what Obama could bring about by going to Jerusalem. Standing at the very same Knesset podium where Anwar Sadat once stood, Obama could with drama and empathic oratory unveil a new American policy for the Middle East. It would lay out the following five policy initiatives:

1. America's full endorsement, with the immediate backing of the United Nations Security Council, of the 2002 Nusseibeh-Ayalon Plan for the creation of two states—with June 1967 borders (with small, one-to-one adjustments) and Jerusalem being the shared capital of both states.

2. A proposal—again backed by a new UN Security Council mandate—that the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Plan be put to a referendum in both Israel and the occupied territories within three months. (This particular peace plan is similar to the December 2000 Clinton Parameters, the 2003 Geneva Accord and the Arab League's 2002 peace initiative—but the simple, six-point Nusseibeh-Ayalon Plan has the added attraction of having been endorsed by some quarter-million Israelis and about 160,000 Palestinians.)

3. If said referendum is not held, then America would press the UN to impose economic sanctions against the offending party or parties. Economic and military aid to Israel or the Palestinians would be suspended until that time when a two-state solution is fully implemented.

4. An American pledge to bring Israel within NATO's security umbrella—if and only if Israel agrees to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

5. When the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Plan is fully implemented, America and the international community would pledge to create a Middle Eastern Economic Investment Authority on the scale of the 1948 Marshall Plan for European recovery.

These five steps would remake the Middle East. Initially, such a seismic change in US policy would cause political upheavals across the Arab world. The current coalition government in Israel would not survive. But a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians—even in Hamas-controlled Gaza—would most probably vote for the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Plan. And if they did not, well, America would be fully justified in disengaging from the Middle East. We could then with a clear conscience do what "realists" like Aaron David Miller suggest—nothing.

But I doubt this would be necessary. Most people would recognize that Obama's new paradigm was rational, democratic and the obvious road to peace and security. Israel would become a smaller state, but it would at last be secure and at peace with all its neighbors.

Some may complain that I am leaving Iran's theocracy out of the scenario. But the upheavals that would accompany Obama's trip to Jerusalem would inevitably affect the viability of that regime as well. Perhaps after Jerusalem Obama could plan a trip to Tehran. The road to Tehran clearly lies through Jerusalem.

Make your reservations on Air Force One, Mr. President! You need to start earning that Nobel Peace Prize. KAI BIRD

Kai Bird is a Nation *contributing editor, a Pulitzer Prize–winning historian and the author, most recently, of* Crossing Mandelbaum Gate: Coming of Age Between the Arabs and Israelis, 1956–1978.

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Activist and documentarian Iara Lee was aboard the *Mavi Marmara* when it was attacked by Israeli commandos. Watch footage she took just before the attack and listen to her conversation with Roane Carey.

Let the Bhopal gas disaster settlement be a horrifying reminder: it is a constant temptation for profit-maximizing corporations to cut corners on safety, writes Mark Hertsgaard in **BP Gets a Bitter Lesson From Bhopal**.

Watch Katrina vanden Heuvel on **Real Time With Bill Maher** talking about BP and corporate irresponsibility in the aftermath of the oil spill.

Doctors and psychologists weren't only observing "enhanced interrogations"; they were using information gathered to create a legal defense for those who authorized torture, write Jeremy Brecher and Brendan Smith in **Report Finds Evidence of Medical Experimentation at Black Sites**.

President Obama has repeatedly promised to end the policy banning gays, lesbians and bisexuals from serving openly in the military. On The Breakdown Christopher Hayes asks law professor Tobias Wolff, **On 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Repeal, What Are We Waiting For?**

In **Hot Plate**, Anna Lappé, author of *Diet for a Hot Planet*, talks with Tom Philpott about connections between what we eat and our warming planet.

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Katha Pollitt

Abraham Lincoln, Meet Client #9

Saving scrap metal. Buying war bonds. Gathering around the radio for a fireside chat after a simple but nutritious Mom-cooked meal made from rationed ingredients. It can't really have been much fun to work in a munitions plant while worried to a frazzle about your son or sweetheart overseas, but the domestic front of World War II has entered our collective memory as a safe and happy place full of solidarity, adventure, a sense of purpose and an egalitarian spirit. If you think about it, many of our favorite American stories have that poor-but-happy feel: *Walden*, *Little Women*, the *Little House* books, the Waltons, even *Huckleberry Finn*.

Real life is something else again. World War II was just about the last time Americans accepted the challenge of sacrifice in pursuit of common goals. As many have noted, Jimmy Carter was mocked and scorned as a cardigan-wearing wimp when he gave a fireside chat of his own in 1977, declaring the energy crisis "the moral equivalent of war" and calling for a massive panoply of conservation measures. No wonder George W. Bush urged us to go shopping after 9/11 and in the wake of the BP oil disaster, President Obama has suggested vacationing in the gulf region. Pundits love to summon us to tighten our belts—practically every week Tom Friedman calls for raising the federal gas tax—but they don't have to get elected.

I would gladly pay higher taxes to prevent layoffs of teachers, cops and firemen; to improve our schools and universities; keep libraries open; expand public transportation; and put unemployed people to work repairing our tattered infrastructure, building public housing, maintaining our parks, staffing childcare centers. And what about that green technology Obama used to talk about—wind power, solar power, high-speed trains? There is no shortage of important work that needs to be done, and the costs of not doing it are very high. Unfortunately, the same leaders who fear asking us to sacrifice by paying higher taxes have no qualms about spending the money we already give them—and borrowing more—to pay for wars, war toys and prisons, while organizing the tax structure around the greed of corporations and the richest sliver of the population. The lavishing of treasure to pay for our militarized, increasingly unequal society is the sacrifice most of us are already making. Is it any wonder that people respond to calls for sacrifice with defensiveness and cynicism?

Adding to the difficulty of selling the public on sacrifice is that the salesman is usually a very rich and successful person who will barely feel the pinch of the policies he proposes. "Americans have become masters of 'sacrifice avoidance,'" intones Eliot Spitzer in his *Slate* column. This immensely wealthy man, who spent more than $100,000 on prostitutes and thereby cost New York its best shot in a generation at a functioning state government, tells *me* to read the Gettysburg Address and be inspired to "a greater sense of national purpose"?

Multimillionaires who argue for raising taxes should start by proposing taxes on themselves that would actually lower their standard of living. Until then, they're not really sharing the sacrifice they want to impose on the rest of us.

* * *

Great News! Remember Nazia Quazi, the young Canadian who was held in Saudi Arabia against her will by her father for almost three years and whose struggle to return to Canada I wrote about here in February? She's finally free. With her parents' permission, she married her longtime boyfriend, Bjorn Singhal, in Dubai on May 17, and is once again a free Canadian adult woman. *Mazel tov* to the happy couple—may they have much joy.

It's fortunate that Nazia was able to solve her problem herself, because as far as anyone knows, the Canadian government did little to help her beyond asking the Saudi Human Rights Commission, a government agency, for a meeting. (The Canadian Foreign Affairs Department refused to comment for this column, invoking the Privacy Act.) This, despite significant press coverage and the best efforts of Human Rights Watch, Muslims for Progressive Values and numerous individuals—to protest Nazia's treatment, three Canadian Gulf War veterans returned medals bestowed on them by the Saudi government.

Nazia's troubles are over, but the Saudi laws that trapped her are still firmly in place, under which all women, no matter their age, are legal minors under the guardianship of a male relative, whose permission is required for just about every aspect of normal life. That Nazia is not a Saudi—and neither is her father, an Indian—should have made a difference, but it did not.

Sadly, Nazia is not the only Canadian woman to have been trapped in Saudi Arabia. Twenty-six-year-old Nathalie Morin and her three young children have been held prisoner by the father of her children, Saeed al-Sharahni, for more than five years; although a new law permits foreign wives to leave the country without their husbands' permission, it is not retroactive and does not apply to their children. According to her mother, who has tirelessly campaigned for her daughter's return, Sharahni has imprisoned Morin in a locked room, prevents her from communicating with the outside world and frequently beats her. Her mother also claims Nathalie and Saeed were never actually married. Amnesty International has taken up Morin's case, and recently all three opposition parties in Canada have called on Stephen Harper's Conservative government to take action. It is really hard to believe that nothing can be done, and yet, amazingly, nothing happens. Find out more at nathaliemorin.org/english.

Of course, Saudi women are the primary victims of the guardianship system and Saudi family law. I'll have more about their stories in a future column. ■

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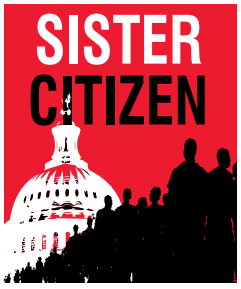
Melissa Harris-Lacewell

You've Got to Be Carefully Taught

I spent Memorial Day in New Orleans, where I watched a group of citizens lay a wreath at the foot of a statue of Jefferson Davis. It was a jarring reminder of how the South understands American history. Memorial Day was founded after the Civil War to honor Union soldiers. When Southerners choose to memorialize Confederate leaders, it is an act of subversive historical revision and an indication of the unresolved political and cultural anxieties that stir just below the surface of the "New South."

The white New Orleanians paying their respects to Davis made me nervous. Few things disgusted Confederates more than property-owning women, free blacks and evidence of miscegenation. I am all of these, so I feel the very legitimacy of my citizenship is challenged by their nostalgia. But I noticed that those gathered at the monument appeared to be mostly senior citizens. In contrast, young New Orleanians were hanging out in integrated groups in the park, listening to music, drinking beer and worrying about how the impending hurricane season would affect the BP oil disaster.



The generational divide in how these Southerners spent Memorial Day was jarring and instructive. In May, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed a bill cutting state funding to schools that offer classes "designed primarily for students of a particular ethnic group" or "advocating ethnic solidarity." The law aims to ban ethnic studies curriculums and implies that classes in African-American history or Latino literature are dangerous and discriminatory. Then the Texas State Board of Education voted to introduce a considerably more conservative slant to the social studies curriculum. In the revised Texas version of history, there is an increased emphasis on Phyllis Schlafly, segregationist George Wallace and the National Rifle Association, while the United Nations is presented as an enemy of American sovereignty and the separation of church and state is reduced to an ideological suggestion rather than a constitutional mandate.

The celebration of Confederate traitors as American heroes, the whitewash of school curriculums and the conservative reinterpretation of national history are weapons in America's decades-long culture war. These policies reflect an impulse similar to the Cultural Revolution of Communist China: an attempt to gain authority by controlling the very definitions of truth available to young people. After all, it is among young Americans that conservatives are losing this war, and if they are serious about taking back their country, the education of American youth is the critical terrain where they plan to make a stand.

Young Americans are significantly different from their older counterparts. At the end of the Clinton administration a majority of young Americans strongly supported multicultural education and believed that the government should ensure integrated schools and workplaces. In the year George W. Bush was re-elected, an overwhelming majority of young Americans believed gay men and lesbians should have equal protection in housing and employment and should be protected under hate crimes legislation. Barack Obama garnered two of every three votes cast by people under 30. Across parties, ideologies, regions and religions, young people are less likely to subscribe to racial stereotypes, more likely to support legal equality for gay Americans and more likely to believe tolerance is an important ideal. These enduring generational trends have prompted some observers to question the long-term viability of the GOP—which seems to be growing older but not grander.

These statistics are comforting for progressives, who tend to believe that generational replacement will be enough to usher in a new liberal majority. They wax poetic about how the Obama generation—young people coming of age with a black president, female secretary of state and Hispanic justice of the Supreme Court—will undoubtedly extend the social safety net, end discriminatory state practices and create a more just nation. But the differences between younger and older Americans are neither automatic nor inevitable; they are the result of demographic, policy and curricular changes that occurred as the result of protest and struggle in post–civil rights America.

Although poor urban minorities continue to suffer the effects of hyper-segregated communities, young white Americans live in a more diverse world than their parents did as children. More than ever, white children learn in integrated classrooms, have mothers who work outside the home, encounter racial minorities in positions of authority, learn about different religious traditions, read literature by diverse authors, encounter same-sex families as a routine part of the popular culture and have technology-based access to a dizzying array of opinions. These experiences are widely seen as necessary components for contemporary citizenship. In fact, in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's *Bollinger* decision, the state's compelling interest in ensuring diverse educational environments is the last legal standard on which affirmative action rests.

Social conservatives shudder with apocalyptic anxiety about these generational trends. They understand that the best defense against this frightening, changing world is to wrest control of the historical narrative. To retake the country, they must first reshape young people's reality by revising the meaning of their daily lives. They must make traitors into heroes, erase the contributions of marginal groups, decry self-knowledge as sedition and reinforce fear of those who are different. I'm reminded of the lyrics of a song in *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein's controversial 1949 musical: "You've got to be taught to hate and fear,/You've got to be taught from year to year,/It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—/You've got to be carefully taught." Arizona and Texas policy-makers seem to be using the lyrics as a guide to curriculum development, but they may find that the world has already moved beyond their fearful grasp. ■

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The Nation.

THE BOYCOTT DIVESTMENT SANCTIONS MOVEMENT

ADAM HOROWITZ & PHILIP WEISS

BDS has become a key battleground in the struggle over the future of Israel/Palestine.

In April the student senate at the University of California, Berkeley, twice held all-night sessions to debate a proposal urging the school to divest from two US military companies "materially and militarily profiting" from the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Hundreds of people packed the hall, and statements in support of the measure were read aloud from leaders, including Noam Chomsky, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Naomi Klein and Alice Walker. In the end the divestment measure failed (the senate majority of 13 to 5 was not enough to overturn the student government president's veto), but the outcome was surely less significant than the furor over the issue. Following related battles last year at Hampshire College and the Toronto International Film Festival, the Berkeley measure was yet another signal that the divestment initiative, part of a broader movement popularly known as BDS, for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, has become a key battleground in the grassroots struggle over the future of Israel/Palestine.

"We're at a super-exciting moment, truly a turning point," says Rebecca Vilkomerson of Jewish Voice for Peace, an activist organization that supports selective divestment from companies profiting from the occupation. "For the first time we're seeing a serious debate of divestment at a major public university." BDS supporters say the movement has the potential to transform international opinion in much the way that the divestment movement in the 1980s isolated the South African apartheid regime. Or as Tutu wrote to the Berkeley students:

> The same issue of equality is what motivates the divestment movement of today, which tries to end Israel's 43 year long occupation and the unequal treatment of the Palestinian people by the Israeli government ruling over them. The abuses they face are real, and no person should be offended by principled, morally consistent, nonviolent acts to oppose them. It is no more wrong to call out Israel in particular for its abuses than it was to call out the Apartheid regime in particular for its abuses.

Opponents of BDS see just that threat—that Israel will be isolated. They say that BDS unfairly singles out Israel for conduct that other states are also guilty of and that it seeks to delegitimize the Jewish state in the eyes of the world, thereby threatening Israel's existence. Some argue that grassroots actions put the emphasis on the wrong target. As Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center said on *Democracy Now!* in March, "It's the United States government you've got to look to, not private industry or private commerce. So that's one really big difference simply at strategic and tactical levels."

When did the BDS movement begin, why is it growing and what does it want?

The campaign traces its origins to a July 2004 advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice (the World Court), which found Israel's separation wall in the West Bank to be "contrary to international law." The ICJ also recommended that the parts of the wall built inside the occupied territories be dismantled and that Palestinians affected by the wall be compensated. When a year passed with no sign that the opinion would be enforced, a wide-ranging coalition of more than 170 organizations representing Palestinian civil society issued a call for boycott, divestment and sanction of Israel "until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights." Compliance meant three things: ending the occupation, recognizing equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel and respecting the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194 of 1948.

The "call" (which can be found at bdsmovement.net) was notable for unifying the Palestinian grassroots and for the simplicity and coherence of its platform. BDS was seen as an "essential component" for shifting the playing field in the Palestinians' favor after the slow death of the peace process, the Israeli settlement expansion and the inability of the international community to hold Israel accountable.

Boycotts are not a new tactic for Palestinians. As far back as the 1936–39 revolt against the British Mandate, Palestinians incorporated general strikes and boycotts into their struggle. During the first intifada in the late 1980s, they boycotted Israeli goods, and the West Bank town of Beit Sahour led efforts to refuse to pay Israeli taxes that helped finance the occupation. And in 2001 an international boycott effort was launched after the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. It quickly met forceful pushback, notably in a 2002 charge by Harvard president Lawrence Summers that divestment was anti-Semitic "in effect, if not intent."

Today the BDS movement is loosely coordinated by a body called the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions Campaign National Committee (BNC), which is made up of nongovernmental organizations representing Palestinian civil society. The BNC is not affiliated with any political party (though it has been endorsed by some) and does not take positions on issues that fall outside the specific principles of the "call." Thus it does not endorse either a one-state or two-state solution to the conflict.

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Israel's 2008–09 attack on Gaza spurred the campaign in the United States and around the world. "The most important thing for the Palestinian movement is the rise of the solidarity movement worldwide after the war crimes in Gaza," Palestinian activist and former Palestinian Authority presidential candidate Mustafa Barghouthi said earlier this year at a demonstration in the West Bank. "Boycott is the best way of changing the balance of forces. Military force will not work, because of the imbalance of forces, but also because it is not right. I don't think Israel will change its policy unless it hurts, and BDS will hurt it."

Most recently, Israel's raid on the Free Gaza flotilla, which killed at least nine activists, has added fuel to the campaign. The attack on a humanitarian ship seemed to reignite much of the international furor from the Gaza invasion of the year before, as it highlighted Israel's inhumane policy of collective punishment in the besieged territory. And with this latest outrage came even louder calls for accountability.

BDS represents three strategies: boycotts are commonly carried out by individuals, divestment by institutions and sanctions by governments. For example, organizers have called on people to avoid buying products made in Israeli settlements; on churches to sell stocks of companies such as Caterpillar, which makes the infamous D9 bulldozer used to demolish Palestinian homes and fields; and on politicians to make conditional or end US aid to Israel. BDS's proponents argue that unless Israel experiences material, political and moral pressure, it will maintain the status quo. Nobel laureates Shirin Ebadi, Mairead Maguire (Corrigan), Rigoberta Menchu Tum and Jody Williams made this point in a letter supporting the Berkeley divestment bill:

> We stand united in our belief that divesting from companies that provide significant support for the Israeli military provides moral and strategic stewardship of tuition and taxpayer-funded public education money. We are all peace makers, and we believe that no amount of dialogue without economic pressure can motivate Israel to change its policy of using overwhelming force against Palestinian civilians.

The movement has won adherents by saying that it will accept any gesture of boycott or divestment that Westerners are willing to make. "If you only want to boycott an egg, we want you to boycott an egg," said Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), which is part of the BNC, during a tour of America last year to drum up support.

Adam Horowitz and Philip Weiss are the editors of the website Mondoweiss, which covers the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Even the Palestinian Authority—never celebrated for its connection to the grassroots—has made a nod toward the movement, with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad vowing to empty Palestinian homes of goods made in the settlements. But BDS's biggest victories have come in the West and have involved divestments from businesses profiting from investment in the West Bank, where 2.5 million Palestinians live under an occupation whose hundreds of armed checkpoints and separate roadways for Jewish colonists have led some South Africans to declare that the system is worse than apartheid. French multinational Veolia Transport was targeted for its role in building a light-rail system that will connect West Jerusalem to settlements in the occupied territories. Veolia dropped out of the project following an escalating international campaign against the firm, during which the Dutch ASN Bank severed ties to Veolia. Israeli diamond merchant Lev Leviev was also targeted because of his funding of settlements. Last year the US investment firm BlackRock divested itself of stock in Leviev's Africa-Israel company, and Britain canceled plans to move its Tel Aviv embassy into a Leviev-owned building. Similarly, the Frankfurt-based Deutsche Bank recently divested its shares in the Israeli military contractor Elbit Systems, which supplies components for the separation wall. Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler, vice president of Pax Christi Germany, who helped lead the campaign, called it "a huge success.... [Deutsche Bank] went out of their way to list numerous standards and international ethical commitments to which the bank is party, highlighting how Elbit investments would violate them all."

> 'I don't think Israel will change its policy unless it hurts, and BDS will hurt it.'
> —Palestinian leader Mustafa Barghouthi

The immediate aftermath of the flotilla attack saw a surge in BDS activity across Europe. Most notably, Britain's largest union, UNITE, passed a motion to "vigorously promote a policy of divestment from Israeli companies," along with a boycott of Israeli goods and services. At the same time, the Swedish Port Workers Union announced it would refuse to load or unload any ships coming to or from Israel for nine days, to protest the flotilla raid.

In the United States, BDS has been percolating among activist groups, churches and campuses for several years. Since 2005 the Presbyterian Church (USA) has undertaken what it calls a "phased, selective divestment" process aimed at five companies benefiting from the occupation [see Hasdai Westbrook, "The Israel Divestment Debate," May 8, 2006]. Again, the West Bank is the focus. Adalah-NY, a New York–based justice group, regularly leads pickets of Leviev's Madison Avenue jewelry store and pressured UNICEF and the humanitarian organization Oxfam to distance themselves from Leviev. The peace group Code Pink has led a campaign called "Stolen Beauty" that targets Ahava, a cosmetics company based in a West Bank settlement that uses ingredients from the Dead Sea.

"What we've seen in the past two years is a rapidly growing, diverse movement dedicated to universal human rights and international law," says David Hosey, a spokesman for the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, a national coalition of grassroots organizations that supports BDS. "On

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Dr. Satyan L. Devadoss is Associate Professor of Mathematics at Williams College. A scholar of topology and computational geometry, Professor Devadoss holds a Ph.D. in Mathematics from The Johns Hopkins University. His awards include the William Kelso Morrill Award for excellence in teaching mathematics.

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campuses and in communities across the United States, people are sending a clear message that if the US government won't hold Israel accountable for violations of Palestinian human rights, then civil society will step up and do the job."

Two of the biggest divestment fights in the past year in some ways could not have been more different—Hampshire College in Massachusetts and the Toronto International Film Festival. One year ago Hampshire students ignited a firestorm with a campus divestment campaign that drew national attention, including calls from Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz to student organizers on their cellphones. The Hampshire board of directors voted to divest from six military companies involved in the occupation and to adopt a "social responsibility" screen for Hampshire's investments. Though the administration denied that the divestiture was specifically aimed at the Israeli occupation, the headlines helped catalyze the national student BDS movement. In November the college hosted a divestment organizing conference of student leaders from more than forty campuses, including Berkeley; UC, San Diego; the University of Arizona; and Carleton University in Ottawa—whose campaigns all made news this past spring. The movement won a notable victory in June when the student body of Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington—Rachel Corrie's alma mater—voted to call on the college to divest from companies profiting from the occupation and to ban the use of Caterpillar equipment on campus. The resolution passed with nearly 80 percent of the vote. Evergreen junior Anna Simonton explained that the issue resonated across the student body because of the US role in the conflict. "This issue is something we're all complicit in," she said. "It's our money and our taxes."

'We think it's a delegitimizing tactic, inflammatory, won't end the occupation and isn't productive.' —Naomi Paiss, New Israel Fund

At the Toronto International Film Festival last fall, movie premieres were overshadowed by the controversy over a "city to city" promotion by the festival that paired Toronto with Tel Aviv. In a "Toronto Declaration," critics said the showcase had been pushed by the Israeli consulate as part of its efforts to "rebrand" Israel after the horrific public relations fallout from the Gaza war months earlier [see Horowitz and Weiss, "American Jews Rethink Israel," November 2, 2009].

The response from Israel's supporters was immediate and forceful. Big-name stars, including Sacha Baron Cohen and Jerry Seinfeld, came out against the declaration, and so did filmmakers David Cronenberg and Ivan Reitman. Dan Adler, a former executive at the Creative Artists Agency, worked with the Los Angeles Jewish Federation and United Jewish Appeal of Toronto to push the claim that the declaration was a boycott of the festival and a blacklist of Israeli artists. The declaration was neither, but the response was a sign of where the battle was headed, with many Israel supporters describing BDS as a Trojan horse aimed at delegitimizing Israel as a Jewish state.

In January the Reut Institute, a Tel Aviv think tank, issued a report describing BDS as part of a campaign "to demonize Israel." The movement has had limited "practical success," the Reut study said, but it has been "highly successful in generating publicity and in mobilizing anti-Israel activism, in effect uniting anti-Zionists with critics of specific Israeli policies." The risk, Reut went on, was to Israel's image: "that such campaigns will create an equivalency between Israel and apartheid-era South Africa that penetrates the mainstream of public and political consciousness."

This fear was echoed by Asher Fredman, a commentator on the website of the Israeli paper *Yediot Ahronot*, who described the BDS movement as a "soft war" against Israel. "The point that must be internalized is that the soft war constitutes not simply a nuisance or even an economic threat," Fredman warned. "It is a process that could play a major role in shaping the future status quo between Israel and the Palestinians."

Many American Jewish community groups have taken action against the movement on a similar basis. The delegitimization worry has generated some surprising alliances between liberal Zionist groups and right-wing hawks. BDS supporters counter that it is Israel's actions, not the protest, that are delegitimizing Israel in the eyes of the public. Ali Abunimah, author, activist and co-founder of the Electronic Intifada website, said at the Hampshire BDS conference, "Israel's self-image as a liberal Jewish and democratic state is impossible to maintain against the reality of a militarized, ultranationalist, sectarian Jewish settler colony that has to carry out regular massacres of indigenous civilians in order to maintain its control. Zionism simply cannot bomb, kidnap, assassinate, expel, demolish, settle and lie its way to legitimacy and acceptance."

Some liberal Jewish organizations and individuals have adopted a now-is-not-the-time policy. Naomi Paiss of the New Israel Fund says she respects colleagues who do not buy goods made in the territories, but she believes an "official" boycott of companies in the territories would be impossible to implement, given that major Israeli companies and the Israeli government itself are involved. "We think it's a delegitimizing tactic, inflammatory, won't end the occupation and isn't productive," she e-mailed. Cora Weiss, a longtime liberal leader who championed Hampshire's South Africa divestment initiative in the 1970s, when she was on the board, says BDS is too broad-brush. "César Chávez led a focused boycott—grapes—and for several years no one ate grapes," she recalls. "That had an impact."

Americans for Peace Now has also criticized BDS as being counterproductive and even anti-Semitic. The longtime peace group said in a recent statement that the campaign creates a "circle the wagons" reaction in the Jewish community:

> Such a response is understandable, since much of the pressure for such campaigns comes from historically virulently anti-Israel sources that are often not interested in Israeli security concerns or Palestinian behavior. This in turn creates very real and understandable worries about global anti-Semitism and the perception that the campaigns are

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not truly (or only) about Israeli policies but rather reflect a deep-seated hatred for and rejection of Israel.

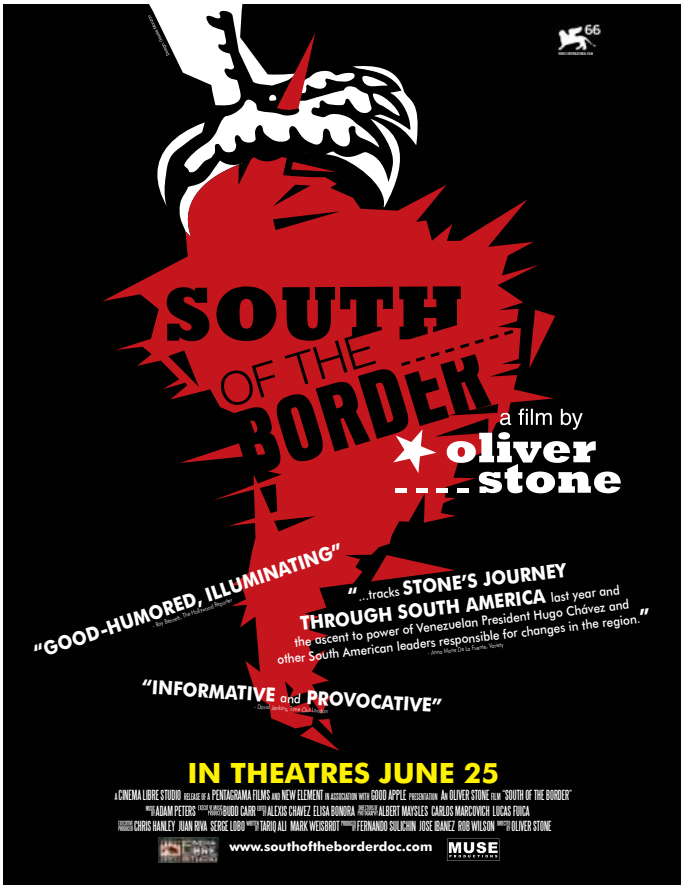
Parts of this ad hoc coalition went into action during the Berkeley divestment debate. J Street, the new alternative Israel lobby, joined forces with such right-wing groups as the Anti-Defamation League, the David Project and StandWithUs\SF to decry the original Berkeley senate bill. The issue is "complex," the coalition warned, and that "complexity should be reflected in the dialogue on campus rather than singling out one side or another for condemnation and punishment."

According to the *Jewish Daily Forward*, Berkeley Hillel, a Jewish campus organization, "coordinated a comprehensive national lobbying campaign consisting of a teach-in, face-to-face meetings with student senators and an intervention by a Nobel laureate [Elie Wiesel], all aimed at robbing the divestment supporters of three senate votes." Adam Naftalin-Kelman, Berkeley Hillel's newly installed executive director, said the strategy was devised at a roundtable convened by Hillel and attended by representatives of local branches of J Street, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Jewish Community Relations Council, as well as local rabbis and Israel's consul general in San Francisco. This strategy included circulating antidivestment talking points that urged students to reframe the debate as an attack on the Jewish community and to avoid talking about the particulars of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

But Jewish organizations face insurgent generational forces over the issue. Some students in J Street's college organizations quietly support BDS as a nonviolent means of doing something to end the oppression of Palestinians. This tension was even on display at J Street's organizing conference in October. During a student workshop called "Reckoning With the Radical Left on Campus: Alternatives to Boycotts and Divestments," there was reportedly considerable interest in divestment campaigns targeting the occupation. At the same time, "J Street U," the student branch of J Street, is officially opposed to divestment and has begun an "Invest, Don't Divest" campaign, which encourages students to "Invest $2 for 2 States" as an alternative to BDS activities on campus.

By opposing direct action, the older generation is arguing that government must take the lead through a peace process that so far has resulted in little more than further Israeli colonization. "I find boycotts kind of distasteful. It's a little bit like collective punishment," says Ralph Seliger, long associated with Meretz USA, a left Zionist organization. "That probably wouldn't be very emotionally satisfying to someone who was upset about the issue. But I think it's part of growing up to understand that the world is not here to give you emotional satisfaction, and in this issue there is both complexity and perplexity, and you need to learn as much as you can, and be receptive to all sides, and be discerning."

Portions of the BDS call have been unsettling even to longtime advocates for Middle East peace. Its support for the refugees' right of return is a deal breaker for many liberal Zionists, who believe Israel needs to maintain a Jewish majority. Other activists have said BDS should focus primarily on the US role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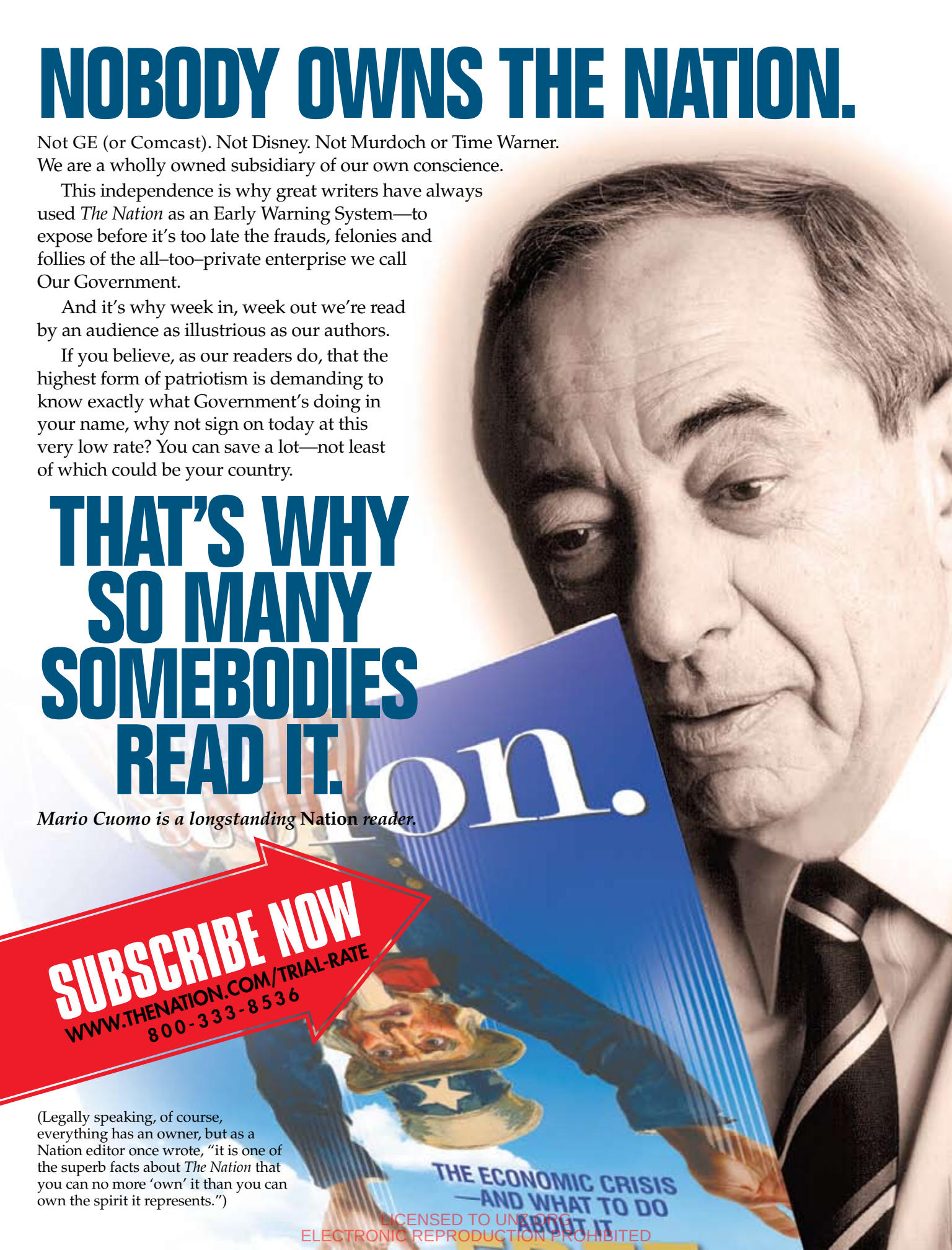

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in the conflict. Israeli writer and activist Joseph Dana says that while the campaign has informed people around the world about the issue, almost all US military aid to Israel winds up in the United States with military manufacturers, so "it would be more productive for the BDS campaigns to focus on these companies," especially if American citizens are doing the pressuring.

Perhaps the most controversial part of the BDS movement, even for some supporters, has been the call for a cultural and academic boycott. Organizers of the boycott explain that it is directed at institutions, not individuals, meaning that people are encouraged to boycott academic conferences, events or products (i.e., films, talks or performances) sponsored by the Israeli government or Israeli universities but not individual academics based on their politics. MIT scientist Nancy Kanwisher recently circulated anonymous letters of support for an academic boycott from two colleagues. One colleague said that while refusing to support Israeli academic research, "I will continue to collaborate with, and host, Israeli scientific colleagues on an individual basis."

Alisa Solomon, a noted critic of Israel's actions and editor, with Tony Kushner, of *Wrestling With Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, says she supports BDS but draws the line at academic boycott. "I believe in and support a lot of [the BDS movement]; I just see a lot of different strains and approaches and am enthusiastic about some (economic boycotts against settlement products, companies participating in and profiting from occupation, plus think we should cut military aid, etc.), generally supportive of others ("don't play Sun City" efforts), and have qualms about academic/cultural in this direction both for the free expression reasons and because it requires declaring some people kosher and some not," she wrote in an e-mail. "I prefer direct to symbolic action, so taking money away from occupation seems to me a far better effort than denouncing, say, a choreographer."

For their part, supporters of the academic boycott say that Israeli universities are implicated in the occupation because they are intimately connected with the Israeli government in ways that outstrip even American university contributions to the Vietnam War effort a generation ago. The argument was lent support last year when Rivka Carmi, president of Ben-Gurion University, attacked faculty member (and frequent *Nation* contributor) Neve Gordon for advocating BDS in an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times*. Gordon had crossed "the boundaries of academic freedom," Carmi said, and she questioned his ability to work at the school: "After his…extreme description of Israel as an 'apartheid' state, how can he, in good faith, create the collaborative atmosphere necessary for true academic research and teaching?"

The controversy came to Tel Aviv University this spring when novelists Margaret Atwood and Amitav Ghosh were named as recipients of a $1 million prize from the Dan David Foundation, which is headquartered at the university. Boycott activists, including students from the besieged Gaza Strip, implored Atwood and Ghosh to refuse the award because of its relationship to the university. In the end, the writers accepted the prize and criticized the activists in their joint acceptance speech: "the all-or-nothings want to bully us into being their wholly owned puppets." They also quoted Anthony Appiah, president of PEN American Center, who said, "We have to stand, as we have stood from the very beginning, against the very idea of a cultural boycott. We have to continue to say: Only connect." After she got home, Atwood wrote a piece for *Ha'aretz* saying that Israel's greatest threat was now internal: "The concept of Israel as a humane and democratic state is in serious trouble."

Another prominent focus of the BDS campaign has been on musicians. In recent months Leonard Cohen played Tel Aviv despite an appeal to him to cancel, while Gil Scott-Heron and Elvis Costello pulled out of their Israeli appearances. Costello explained on his website that his decision was "a matter of instinct and conscience" and that "there are occasions when merely having your name added to a concert schedule may be interpreted as a political act that resonates more than anything that might be sung." The *Forward* recently quoted an anonymous music industry insider who said more than fifteen performers have recently refused to play in Israel, and in the week after the flotilla attack three more popular groups—the Klaxons, Gorillaz and the Pixies—canceled upcoming performances to protest the raid.

In the end many in Israel, and its supporters in the United States, return to the fear that BDS is advancing the likelihood of the dissolution of the Jewish state—the delegitimization issue. "The BDS movement seems dominated by those whose endgame is one state, not two," Meretz USA executive director Ron Skolnik wrote in *Israel Horizons*, a liberal Zionist publication. The movement "apparently wishes to build on legitimate international opposition to the 1967 occupation in order to undermine Israel's independent existence."

Rebecca Vilkomerson says that is not the case. Her group, Jewish Voice for Peace, does not take a position on the two-state versus one-state solution. Many Jewish students who spoke out against the Berkeley measure, she said, objected in highly subjective terms, saying, "We feel marginalized, we feel scared, we feel intimidated, we feel alienated" by the legislation. According to Vilkomerson, the best response to this came from Tom Pessah, an Israeli PhD student at Berkeley and co-author of the bill, who said that it was "OK" to have such feelings. He says he also felt uncomfortable when he first learned how much of his freedom in Israel was based on Palestinian dispossession—and so he feared what justice would entail.

Such anxieties would seem to accompany any transformative social movement, and BDS supporters are beginning to acknowledge them. Palestinian leader Mustafa Barghouthi addressed the issue in his appeal to the Berkeley students on grounds they might best understand. He has lived his life under occupation, he wrote; he and his community seek freedom: "Do not stand in the way like those angry Alabama students 50 years ago blocking integration. You have, I trust, nothing in common with those students but misplaced fear."

The Berkeley bill failed, but the all-night debates only seemed to give the movement confidence that the next vote will go differently. We might not have to wait long to find out: six more American university student bodies are said to be taking up the call in the near future. ■

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Germany and the Euro-Crisis

by JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Starnberg

These are fateful times. The West and Russia celebrated the anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany on May 8 and 9, respectively. Here in Germany these are also officially known as "days of liberation." This year the armed forces of the Allied coalition against Germany (also including a Polish unit) marched together in the victory parade. Angela Merkel stood directly beside Vladimir Putin on Red Square. Her presence reaffirmed the spirit of a "new" Germany: the postwar generations have not forgotten that they were also liberated by the Russian Army—and that the Red Army in the process suffered the heaviest casualties.

The chancellor had flown in from Brussels, where, in an entirely different capacity, she had witnessed a defeat of a completely different kind. The picture of that press conference, in which the EU heads of government announced their decision to establish a joint rescue fund for the ailing euro, betrays the fretfulness not of the "new" but of present-day Germany. The grating photo captures the stony faces of Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy—worn-out heads of government who had nothing left to say to each other. Is it destined to become the iconographic document of the demise of a vision that shaped postwar European history for more than half a century?

In Moscow, Merkel stood in the shadow of the tradition of the old Federal Republic. But in Brussels on May 8, she had behind her the weeks of struggle of a hard-nosed lobbyist for the national interests of the economic powerhouse of the European Union. Appealing to the model of German fiscal discipline, she had blocked a timely joint intervention by the EU to shore up Greece's creditworthiness against speculation aimed at triggering a state bankruptcy. Ineffectual declarations of intent had frustrated concerted preventive action—on the mistaken assumption that Greece was an isolated case.

Not until the most recent slump in the stock market did the chancellor relent meekly, her resistance broken down by the collective psychological massage administered by the presidents of the United States, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. Out of fear of the weapons of mass destruction wielded by the tabloid press, she seemed to have lost sight of the destructive force of the weapons of mass destruction wielded by the financial markets. She would hear nothing of a eurozone, about which the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, would declare in the days that followed: if you don't want a unified economic policy, you'll also have to forget about the monetary union.

The momentousness of the Brussels decision of May 8 is now dawning on all concerned. The Anglicizing metaphors prevalent in Germany, in which we are ceaselessly deploying "rescue parachutes" and cobbling together "rescue packages," should not conceal the fact that the hastily agreed-upon emergency measures to save the euro will have different consequences from any previous bailout. Because the Commission is now taking out loans on the market for the European Union as a whole, this "crisis mechanism" is a "Community Instrument" that changes the basis on which the European Union operates.

RYAN INZANA

The fact that from now on the taxpayers of the eurozone bear joint liability for the budgetary risks of each of the other member states amounts to a paradigm shift. This brings a long-repressed problem to awareness. The financial crisis, which has developed into a crisis of the states, calls to mind the birth defect of an incomplete political union marooned in midstream. A common market with a partially shared currency has developed in an economic zone of continental proportions with a huge population, but without the establishment of institutions at the European level with sufficient powers to coordinate the economic policies of the member states effectively.

No one can write off the call by the president of the IMF for "European economic governance" as unreasonable anymore. The models of a "rule compliant" economic policy and a "disciplined" budgetary policy that conform to the requirements of the stability pact do not meet the requirement of a flexible adaptation to rapidly shifting political constellations. Of course, the national budgets have to be balanced. Yet this is not only about Greek "cheating" and Spanish "delusions of affluence" but an alignment of levels of economic development within a

Jürgen Habermas, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, is the author of such acclaimed works in philosophy and social theory as The Theory of Communicative Action *and* Between Facts and Norms. *Translated by Ciaran Cronin (with acknowledgments to Eric Rosencrantz at presseurop.eu).*

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currency area with diverse national economies. The stability pact, which France and Germany themselves suspended in 2005, has become a fetish. Imposing harsher sanctions will not be sufficient to counterbalance the undesirable consequences of a planned asymmetry between a complete economic and an incomplete political unification in Europe.

Even the business editors of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* see "the European Union at a crossroads." Of course, they are merely invoking a nightmare scenario to stir up Deutschmark nostalgia against the so-called soft-currency countries, while a pliable chancellor is suddenly speaking of the need for Europeans to become "more tightly intermeshed economically and financially." But there is not the slightest trace of an awareness of a sea change. Some are blurring the causal connection between the euro crisis and the banking crisis and are blaming deficient fiscal discipline for the entire disaster. Others are eagerly trying to talk down the problem of the overdue harmonization of national economic policies into a matter of better management.

The European Commission intends to put the interim rescue fund for the euro on a permanent footing and to vet national budgets—even before they are submitted to the national parliaments. It is not that these proposals are unreasonable. However, it is outrageous to suggest that such an encroachment by the Commission on national parliaments' budgetary prerogatives does not impinge on the treaties and that it would not exacerbate the longstanding democratic deficit in an unprecedented way. An effective coordination of economic policies must entail an increase in the powers of the parliament in Strasbourg; it will also stimulate the need for better coordination in other policy fields.

The eurozone countries are heading toward a situation in which they will have to choose between a deepening of European cooperation and relinquishing the euro. It is not a matter of "mutual surveillance of economic policies" (Jean-Claude Trichet) but of concerted action. And German politics is woefully unprepared for that.

The New Generation and the New Indifference

After the Holocaust, it took decades of concerted efforts—from Adenauer and Heinemann through Brandt and Helmut Schmidt to Weizsäcker and Kohl—to bring the Federal Republic back into the fold of civilized nations. A tactically astute Genscherism and an opportunistic orientation to the West were not enough. What was needed was an infinitely arduous change in mentality throughout the whole population. What ultimately won over our European neighbors were, first and foremost, the changed normative convictions and the liberal-minded attitudes of the younger generations who had grown up in the Federal Republic. And, of course, the fact that the convictions of the politicians active at that time could be relied upon played a decisive role in diplomatic relations.

The historically justified distrust of the Germans could not be weakened by their discernible interest in a peaceful European unification alone. West Germans seemed to have come to terms with the partition of the country, in any case. Mindful of their past nationalistic excesses, they could have no trouble in forgoing the recovery of sovereignty rights, in accepting their role as the largest net contributor to Europe and, if need be, in making concessions that paid off for the Federal Republic in any case. To be convincing, the German commitment had to be normatively anchored. Jean-Claude Juncker described the stress test well when, in view of Merkel's cool interest calculation, he missed a willingness "to take domestic political risks for Europe."

The new German intransigence has deeper roots. In the wake of reunification, Germany's perspective had already changed in an enlarged country preoccupied with its own problems. But there was a more sweeping change in mentalities after Helmut Kohl. With the exception of a too quickly exhausted Joschka Fischer, since Gerhard Schröder took office a normatively unambitious generation has been in power that has become preoccupied with a short-winded approach to the day-to-day problems of an increasingly complex society. Conscious of the diminishing room for political maneuver, these people shy away from farsighted goals and constructive political projects, let alone an undertaking like European unification.

The current German elites are enjoying the return to normality as a nation-state. Having reached the end of a "long path to the West," they are certified democrats and can once again be "just like the others." What has disappeared is the anxiousness of a people, who were also defeated morally and were compelled to engage in self-criticism, to find their bearings more rapidly in the postnational constellation. In a globalized world everyone has to learn to incorporate the perspectives of others into his or her own instead of withdrawing into an egocentric blend of aestheticization and utility-maximization. One political symptom of the dwindling willingness to learn are the Maastricht and Lisbon verdicts of the German Federal Constitutional Court, which cling to outmoded dogmatic legal conceptions of sovereignty. The solipsistic and normatively depleted mindset of this self-absorbed colossus in the middle of Europe can no longer even guarantee that the unstable status quo in the EU will be preserved.

The Blunted Sense of Crisis

In and of itself, a change in mentality is no cause for reproach; but the new indifference has implications for our political perceptions of the challenges ahead. Who is really willing to learn the lessons from the banking crisis so eloquently enshrined in the declarations of intent at the G-20 Summit in London more than a year ago—and to fight for them?

As regards taming a financial capitalism spinning out of control, there can be no doubt about the preferences of the majorities among the national populations. In the fall of 2008, for the first time in the history of capitalism, the backbone of the financial market–driven global economic system could be rescued from the brink of collapse only by the guarantees of the taxpayers. And the fact that capitalism is no longer able to reproduce itself under its own steam has now taken root in the consciousness of citizens who, as taxpayers, must bear liability for the "system failure."

The demands of the experts are on the table. Among the proposals under discussion are increasing the equity capital of the banks, greater transparency for the activities of hedge funds, improved oversight of stock markets and rating agencies, the prohibition of fanciful but economically destructive speculative instruments, a tax on financial transactions, a bank

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levy, the separation of investment from commercial banking and the preventive breakup of banking conglomerates that are "too big to fail." A certain nervousness was detectable in the face of Josef Ackermann, the shrewd head lobbyist of the banking industry, when television presenter Maybrit Illner invited him to choose between at least a selection of these legislative "instruments of torture."

I don't mean to suggest that regulating financial markets would be straightforward. It certainly also requires the expertise of the cleverest bankers. But the good intentions are thwarted not so much by the "complexity of the markets" as by the timidity and lack of independence of the national governments. They are thwarted by the rash renunciation of any international cooperation aimed at constructing the political capacities for joint action that we lack—worldwide, in the European Union and, for a start, within the eurozone. When it comes to the bailout for Greece, currency dealers and speculators are more inclined to believe Ackermann's shrewd defeatism than Merkel's lukewarm consent to the euro rescue fund; realistically, they don't think that the euro countries are capable of working together resolutely. How could it be otherwise in a club that squanders its energies in cockfights over appointments to its most influential posts—only to fill them with the most colorless figures?

In times of crisis even individuals can write history. Our lame political elites, who prefer to read the headlines in the tabloids, must not use as an excuse that the populations are the obstacle to a deeper European unification. For they know best that popular opinion established by opinion polls is not the same thing as the outcome of a public deliberative process leading to the formation of a democratic will. To date there has not been a single European election or referendum in any country that wasn't ultimately about national issues and tickets. We are still waiting for a single political party to undertake a constructive campaign to inform public opinion, to say nothing of the blinkered nationalistic vision of the left (by which I do not just mean the German party The Left).

With a little political backbone, the crisis of the single currency can bring about what some once hoped for from a common European foreign policy, namely promoting a cross-border awareness of a shared European destiny. ■

Europe's Voodoo Economics

The debt crisis can be traced to regressive tax cuts, which have also led to growing inequality.

by JORDAN STANCIL

Europe's debt troubles have roiled global markets and led to much braying about people who live beyond their means. In the United States, many fear we face a similar reckoning, and deficit hawks in both parties appear to be in the ascendant as Republicans decry President Obama's "European" tendencies. But something is missing from this discussion, and that is the fact that what helped get Europe into trouble was actually something very American: big, regressive tax cuts that were supposed to pay for themselves but didn't. Thus, the problem is not that we will become Europe but that Europe was trying to become us. And voodoo economics didn't work any better there than it did here.

RYAN INZANA

I am aware that "tax cuts" and "Europe" are not concepts that go together in the minds of most Americans. But bear with me while we look at a few examples. If we take the period from the mid-1990s until today, Germany reduced its corporate tax rate by twenty-seven percentage points, while the top income tax rate was cut by 9.5 points. Over the same period, Spain and France slashed their highest income tax rates by about thirteen percentage points, and Italy reduced its corporate tax rate by 20.8 points and its top income tax rate by 6.1 points.

Along with rate cuts that have disproportionately benefited top earners, the long-term trend in Europe, as in America, has been to shift the source of revenue away from taxes on personal and corporate income, as well as away from employers' share of payroll taxes, and on to workers' share of payroll taxes, according to a 2009 report by the EU statistical agency Eurostat. Some countries have also increased the regressive value-added tax to try to pay for cuts in more progressive sources of revenue, like the income tax.

The upshot, according to Thomas Piketty, professor at the Paris School of Economics, is that taxation in Europe has become more regressive over the past decade and a half, as European countries fight among themselves to attract capital in an era of intensified integration. "We have tax competition in Europe, and the result is very simple: the mobile factor of production, i.e., capital, is taxed less and less; consequently, a less-mobile factor like low-skilled labor is overtaxed," says Piketty.

In Germany, regressive tax cuts have fundamentally changed the country's economic model, according to Peter Bofinger, professor at the University of Würzburg and a heterodox member of the German Council of Economic Experts. "Germany was almost in the same league as Scandinavia [before tax cuts]," says Bofinger. "But now it's no longer in that category."

The results for public finance are clear, according to Bofinger,

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who recently published an op-ed in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* under the contrarian headline "Germany Is Living Below Its Means." "If we had the tax rates that were in place in 1998, we would have 75 billion euros more revenue per year. Meanwhile, countries that refrained from major tax cuts—as in Scandinavia—are in a better fiscal position," said Bofinger. (Germany now plans 81.6 billion euros in spending cuts over four years.)

Henri Emmanuelli, a Socialist member of the French National Assembly and a former budget minister, makes a similar point regarding France's deficit. "If you take the tax cuts, that is our deficit," he said on a recent French radio talk-show.

As in America since the early 1980s, so in Europe—tax systems have become less progressive and have helped increase shortfalls in public budgets. Unfortunately, European tax cuts have done something else Americans can relate to: they've reinforced the trend toward greater income inequality.

Camille Landais, a French economist working at the University of California, Berkeley, has studied the evolution of top incomes in France from 1998 to 2006. Before this period France had actually resisted the trend toward greater inequality seen elsewhere. But Landais found what he calls an "explosion of top income shares" beginning in the late '90s. He emphasizes that this wasn't all due to the decline in top marginal income tax rates, which started around the same time, but tax cuts were a big part of the picture. "Tax cuts reinforce the trend," he said. "And it's a big reinforcing effect."

In Germany, even before the economic crash, studies showed that the middle class was shrinking, the percentage of the population that was poor was growing, and the gap between rich and poor was widening. In a 2008 article Markus Grabka, of the German Institute for Economic Research, described this as "a catching-up process"—i.e., Germany was catching up with the levels of inequality observed in the English-speaking world.

Continental Europe is still far less unequal than the United States. "But the trend is in line with the trends in the United States since the 1980s," says Landais. "If the tax systems—which are much flatter than most people think—continue to be as flat as they are, it's clear that in twenty years there's no reason France and Germany wouldn't be as unequal as the United States."

Ironically, center-left parties enacted some of the most regressive tax policies. In France, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's Socialist government (1997–2002) began steep rate cuts, which were continued by subsequent conservative governments in preparation for the tax-slashing apotheosis that would occur when President Nicolas Sarkozy took office in 2007.

In Germany, the Social Democrat/Green coalition led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998–2005) showed a zeal for tax cuts that surprised everyone. As the important weekly *Die Zeit* commented in a 2000 editorial: "The coalition is pursuing a policy that no one would have believed two years ago: the retreat of the state, symbolized by…the forswearing of tax revenue and the biggest cuts in the top tax rates in the history of postwar Germany."

Why the European center-left went down this path is a vastly complicated subject. But one reason is that center-left parties wanted to be seen as competent economic managers, and this meant not challenging the reigning dogma that growth occurs when capital is liberated. It is not widely enough known in the United States just how deeply this thinking penetrated European public discourse, but it is emblematic that the editorial quoted above from the very Social Democratic *Die Zeit* did not criticize the Schröder government's tax cuts. It warmly approved of them, and even justified them with the following categorical statement, which could have been taken from a US Chamber of Commerce policy paper: "There's no doubt about it: The powers of growth in the economy will be strengthened thanks to a lower tax burden, German companies will become even more competitive, and foreign investors will no longer recoil before high German taxes. All that improves the prospect for new jobs."

With the intellectual battlefield almost entirely ceded in this way, what did the center-right do? It demanded even further tax cuts. Thus Friedrich Merz, the most vigorous proponent of smaller government among Germany's conservative Christian Democrats, mounted attack after attack on the Schröder tax cuts for being too timid. The center-left was for massive, regressive, history-making tax cuts; the center-right was for bigger ones. In her 2005 campaign, Angela Merkel even employed a prominent flat-tax advocate as a key adviser (although she had to distance herself from him as Schröder, trying to rally the socialist base, made hay of this). After the 2009 elections, Merkel's coalition with the probusiness Free Democrats proposed yet more tax cuts—but these have been put on hold for now, as the focus turns to aggressive deficit reduction.

If current tax systems continue, says French economist Camille Landais, soon France and Germany will be just as unequal as the US.

It is in this context that one begins to understand how galling the current drive for austerity might appear to the average European voter. Revenue was decreased in ways that disproportionately benefited the very wealthy. The promised boom that was then supposed to create growing incomes for all failed to appear. Then the banks were bailed out as the economy fell into recession. And now the bill is being presented to people who weren't even invited to the party.

Besides the technical economic reality that this is probably the wrong time for contractionary measures, the politics of austerity will be made all the more difficult because of the recent history of regressive tax cuts. This is important to remember because most media will surely portray those who protest spending cuts as unreasonable and spoiled, as coddled crybabies who refuse to recognize that the money simply isn't there to be spent. It will be important to remember why the money's not there. As in the United States, a big reason the money is not there is that taxes were cut too much on the richest individuals and corporations.

While policy-makers should focus on growth and employment, not deficit reduction, we will need in the longer term to

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establish a new political economy in both Europe and America. This postcrisis political economy will have to be based on a reinvigorated philosophy of economic justice and equality, and the policy manifestation of this can be nothing other than a return to the much higher tax rates on very high incomes that existed before the Reagan presidency in the United States and the recent spate of tax cutting in Europe. While tax increases—including for the rich—are on the agenda on both sides of the Atlantic, no one is talking about a fundamental rethinking of tax policy and a return to the tax rates that existed in the United States from the 1940s to the '70s—incidentally the period of the most broadly shared prosperity in American history. Here, as in so many other areas, our response to the crisis has been meek and unimaginative. ■

Where Bad Bills Come From

Meet ALEC, the organization proudly devoted to drafting pro-corporate laws for legislators.

by NICHOLAS KUSNETZ

On April 23—the day after Earth Day—Paul Driessen addressed a rapt audience of state legislators who had come from around the country to talk about climate change and energy policy. "Global warming is a huge moral issue," he proclaimed—just not in the way you may think. "Hydrocarbons are the lifeblood of our economy and society. The benefits are almost too numerous to count," he told the crowd, which filled the hotel ballroom in St. Louis with rousing applause. His message: the energy these fossil fuels produce is "fundamental to the pursuit of happiness and justice," and Congress, the EPA and UN-backed scientists are out to seize control of your state's economy and rob the world's poor of their life, liberty and any last hope for prosperity.

RYAN INZANA

Driessen is a well-known conservative writer, PR flack and climate change denier, and he was speaking at the Spring Task Force meeting of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which brings together state legislators and corporate lobbyists to trade ideas and draft model legislation. The country's largest corporations—ExxonMobil, Koch Industries and Peabody Energy, to name a few—buy a seat at the table and pick up the check. "If you've got a special interest that needs a bill," says Mark Pocan, a Democratic state legislator who is co-chair of the Wisconsin Assembly's Joint Finance Committee, "they've got a lobbyist that helps the process." ALEC even gives directly to state legislators—more than $47,000 in the 2007–08 election cycle, according to the National Institute on Money in State Politics. Most of this money was given as reimbursements for travel to conferences, but ALEC did not report any of the money on its 2008 tax return, as it should have. What's more, legislators deposited some of the checks into their campaign accounts without specifying what they were for, and tax-exempt nonprofits like ALEC are forbidden from contributing to campaigns. If any of this money was used for campaigning, it would be in violation of ALEC's tax status. The money certainly brought legislators to St. Louis, where Driessen implored them to take his message home. "You can make a difference by educating yourselves, voters and other legislators," he said. And with ALEC's help, they had already begun.

Legislators in at least nineteen states have announced resolutions opposing federal action on climate change. The bulk of them—ten of which have passed at least one legislative house—take aim at the EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gases, asking Congress to delay or pre-empt the agency's decision to crack down on global warming pollution beginning in 2012. Lurking behind this coordinated effort are ALEC and a web of fossil fuel industry–funded organizations gaming to undermine science, influence public opinion and remove the best tool the United States has to prevent catastrophic warming.

The bills match the goal of model legislation drafted in 2008 by ALEC's Natural Resources Task Force (currently co-chaired by representatives from the American Gas Association and a major energy utility, along with a legislator from Indiana). Co-sponsors of resolutions in at least ten states either have signed an ALEC letter to Senator Harry Reid asking Congress to strip EPA authority or are members of the organization.

"I think we're taking a snapshot view of climate change and trying to implement policy based on that snapshot," says Jeff Duncan, who sponsored legislation in the South Carolina Statehouse. Duncan says he learned about climate change from conferences and papers from ALEC, the Heartland Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. In 2007 ALEC wrote Duncan a $1,328 travel reimbursement check that was deposited in his campaign fund. He says his legislation did not come out of ALEC specifically.

The resolutions, however, share language citing misinformation peddled by these groups (that temperatures have been flat or decreasing for years, for example). Authors have peppered them with the same "facts" Driessen and other industry-funded deniers use to fan fears of the great economic devastation that federal regulation would supposedly wreak. And at the April meeting, ALEC passed a model bill that would have states pull

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out of regional climate initiatives, previewing its next push.

This is not the first time ALEC has fought corporate America's battles against action on climate change. After George W. Bush's election and subsequent rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, states began passing their own global warming bills—more than 150 from 2001 to 2003, according to ALEC. ExxonMobil and its foundation responded by more than quadrupling its support over these years, to $368,000. ALEC published a report opposing the Kyoto Protocol, written by the Cato Institute's Patrick Michaels, a famous climate change denier. Over the next few years, the organization continued to fight against Kyoto and petitioned the Bush administration to knock down "rogue" state efforts to combat climate change. States' rights is the rallying cry only when convenient.

Founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich and other conservative strategists, ALEC started as a small organization devoted to conservative ideals. In the 1980s it began soliciting the private sector's involvement in order to tap into the great stream of corporate money. ALEC formed its issue-based task forces, jointly run by corporate representatives and state legislators, to write and approve model legislation, which members can then bring back to statehouses. The organization claims almost 2,000 members, nearly a third of all state legislators. "It's not quite as bad as a cult," Pocan says, "but it's very effective nonetheless." Pocan has been following ALEC for years, going so far as to join the organization and attend one of its meetings. "Once you're there it's kind of a smorgasbord for lobbyists." He described corporate representatives—whose employers paid handsomely for this face time—armed with model legislation and talking points being grouped with lawmakers based on geography. Duncan, who has attended a number of ALEC conferences, calls the organization a "very valuable resource" for state legislators.

A particularly glaring example of buying influence came in 1996, when two of ALEC's biggest supporters, Enron and Koch Industries, formed a coalition of industrial players to purchase a majority voting bloc on their task force. Over the objection of the utilities, Enron and company pushed through model legislation recommending that states deregulate their electricity markets over the next few years. "It's a situation where you buy a seat at the table and then you have the opportunity to vote and drive policy," a representative from the utilities told a reporter at the time. "We don't have enough votes." Months later, Enron's Kenneth Lay came with a $20,000 donation to give the keynote speech at ALEC's national meeting, urging legislators to reject regulations, much as Driessen would thirteen years later.

These tactics continue today and have tremendous influence. "I have seen bill after bill introduced in our legislature where you can just tell ALEC was involved," says Pocan. A report released in May by the American Association for Justice detailed a recent example in which Crown Holdings, a major packaging company, was concerned about asbestos-related lawsuits that had accumulated against another company it had acquired years earlier. On behalf of Crown and with the help of a Washington lobbying firm, ALEC pushed legislation that in effect awards Crown immunity from the claims, even as thousands of former workers die from exposure—it has passed in thirteen states. These are just a handful of the 115 bills that were enacted across the country last year based on ALEC models, out of more than 800 introduced. The organization is also behind efforts in dozens of states to nullify the healthcare overhaul with model legislation openly written under the guidance of a health insurance executive.

While ALEC claims to be a membership organization that merely "unites members of the public and private sectors in a dynamic partnership," the power structure is clear. Two corporate donations in 2008—$56,000 from ExxonMobil and $38,000 from the American Petroleum Institute—brought in more than all the membership dues, which provide just over 1 percent of the organization's $7 million annual budget. The rest comes in gifts and grants from the nation's largest corporations, trade groups and their foundations.

Andy Gussert, director of Citizens Trade Campaign, has been monitoring ALEC for years. "ALEC does this incredible job of putting Plato's form of perfect corporate policy out there," he says. "Then they also pay to facilitate future fundraising for these legislators at the conference." But, Gussert says, "at the heart of this it's just a hub to get government relations people from business in the same room as them talking policy, and then in the same room talking fundraising."

Unwittingly or not, the bills' authors have taken the lies fed to them by ALEC model legislation and moved them into public discussion.

ALEC gave more than $1,700 to sponsors of the EPA resolutions during the last election cycle. But its members or recent supporters gave far more—State Senator Tim Huelskamp of Kansas got $2,000 from Koch Industries, $1,200 from ConocoPhillips and related companies, and $600 from ExxonMobil. Money to other sponsors includes a $13,500 donation from MidAmerican Energy, $5,000 from Peabody and thousands more.

ALEC would not comment for this article, but in 1997 ALEC's Dennis Bartlett explained how the organization works. "Our members join for the purpose of having a seat at the table. That's just what we do," he said. "The organization is supported by money from the corporate sector, and, by paying to be members, corporations are allowed the opportunity to sit down at the table and discuss the issues that they have an interest in."

The EPA resolutions themselves are largely symbolic. States have no authority over the EPA, so they simply ask Congress or the EPA not to regulate greenhouse gases. But the statement is exactly what ALEC and its allies are going for. "We're in a period of carpet-bombing or brush-fire tactics from the other side," says Kert Davies, research director at Greenpeace. The resolutions are primarily intended to generate news, Davies and others say, and to shift debate. Unwittingly or not, the bills' authors have taken the lies fed to them by ALEC model legislation and Heartland talking points and moved them into public discussion.

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The argument that local economies—particularly in states that produce or are heavily reliant on fossil fuels—are vulnerable to federal regulation is an easy one to make when most of the country has soured on Washington's handling of the economy. "It's taking money from South Carolina rate-payers and giving to other states that may have been blessed with hydropower or other resources," says Duncan. But at the heart of the legislation is a distrust of the very notion that climate change is a threat. Duncan, for one, says he does not believe in global warming.

However genuine or local his and others' concerns, much of the data they cite comes from a coordinated effort by energy companies to sow doubt. A number of bills refer to the "Climategate" scandal, in which hacked e-mails from British climate scientists supposedly revealed a conspiracy to manufacture data supporting the argument that humans are driving climate change. Never mind that Britain's Parliament debunked the claim: the scandal nonetheless was bounced around by a web of corporate-funded organizations, as detailed in a recent report by Greenpeace. The report shows how the Cato Institute and other groups—a number of which have received more than $1 million each since 2005 from fossil fuel giant Koch Industries—created an echo chamber through blogs, TV news and talking points that has now influenced law. ALEC's Energy and Environment page features papers from Cato, the Mercatus Center, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Institute for Energy Research, each of which has received money from Koch. ALEC's Board of Scholars includes a Heritage trustee and fellows from Cato and the American Enterprise Institute. And the amount of money supporting these groups is tremendous—almost $25 million from Koch and nearly $9 million from ExxonMobil from 2005 to 2008. "These organizations were built to fight against regulations," Davies says. "Now you have the biggest fight ever."

There are those on the other side, like the Coalition of Legislators for Energy Action Now, who are pushing for action on climate change. More than a thousand state legislators signed on to a CLEAN letter asking Congress for a comprehensive climate bill, and they've introduced their own resolutions in a few states. But they are up against a formidable, well-funded foe.

With Obama in the White House and Democrats in control of Congress, corporate groups have turned to more local Astroturf efforts. State legislators, often part-time and understaffed, are easier targets anyway. In their efforts to fight or destroy any hope we have for reining in carbon emissions, these groups are taking the advice of ALEC's former director Samuel Brunelli, who twenty years ago said it plainly: "Take the countryside, and the capital will fall." ALEC's goal, he said, is to ensure that "state legislators are so well informed, so well armed, that they can set the terms of the public policy debate.... This is the infrastructure that will reclaim the states for our movement; these are the people who will make conservative policy; this is our army that we must prepare and support for the battles at hand." ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

self. What I do care about is that we now have so-called healthcare reform without a public option and, thus, no way to control insurance premiums; financial reform that lacks any means to rein in the "too big to fail" banks and other institutions, like Goldman Sachs; and increasing numbers of troops in Afghanistan. And until the BP oil spill, Obama favored offshore drilling. I don't care what race a president "chooses," but he or she *must* bring about sorely needed progressive change.

Carol Hillman

'Get Over It: Write *White*'

New York City

In "Not-Black by Default" [May 10] Patricia J. Williams describes the baroque maneuvers of white colleagues in naming their race on questionnaires. When sophisticated white people use the fact that "racial categories are socially constructed" to avoid listing themselves as "white" on Census and other forms, when they play games with Crayola "buff-beige" self-designations, they are sabotaging the remedies designed to counter our very real privileges as white people. The social construction of race is not an illusion: it is how racism works. Denial does not make it go away. When Williams's colleague explains his refusal to write "white," saying, "We're never going to get past all this, unless we resist the usual categories," he is substituting his wishful good intentions for actions that facilitate change.

Liberals and leftists may reject being in the same racial category as the purveyors of slavery and worldwide white supremacy, but we need not identify with white oppressors to recognize that we are daily privileged by the structure of racism. Try flipping Williams's description of the ways that "to be visibly black in this culture is to feel race every day," because "social constructions have walls." We too are labeled every day as white, but we can be blissfully unaware of the process because for us it is benign.

As a white Jew I emphatically do not identify with the white Europeans who perpetuate worldwide anti-Semitism and racism, but I recognize that in the world of government forms, racial categories are not a matter of psychological self-identification or individual creativity; they are categories with social consequences. We need to get over it: write "white," and then make sure that the data are used to undermine the privileges that we yearn so deeply to deny.

Sherry Gorelick

Sales Alert! Not Chic, St. Francis de

Portland, Ore.

I don't begrudge puzzlers their fun with the Chic Sale potty humor ["Letters," June 21], but I submit the following as a more probable explanation of the first part of clue 9, Puzzle 1588, "Sales decoration of old." Frank Lewis used "Sales," not "Sale," and "decoration of old" is accounted for more clearly. The heraldic emblem ("decoration of old") of St. Francis de Sales contains a prominent crescent moon, like those used on the classic outhouse door.

Mary Priem

Correction

In "Central Europe's Right-Wing Populism," by Paul Hockenos (May 24), a typo gave the Fidesz party's years in power as 1982–2002 rather than 1998–2002. Our apologies to the author.

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Books & the Arts.

Undefined

by ANTONY LERMAN

Anthony Julius

Asked why he had never addressed the problem of anti-Semitism, the eminent Jewish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, born in Poland in 1925, is reported to have replied, "You can't be a bird and an ornithologist at the same time." You needn't agree completely with this sentiment to acknowledge that it captures something of the dilemma that a Jew may face when writing about anti-Semitism, especially in its contemporary form, and especially if he or she writes "as a Jew." With the Holocaust still painfully fresh in people's minds and anti-Semitism a continuing blight on society, maintaining dispassionate objectivity might be too difficult a challenge to meet. Nevertheless, the fact that many recent books about contemporary anti-Semitism have been written by Jews suggests that Bauman's opinion is not widely shared. It's certainly not shared by Anthony Julius, who readily admits that his being Jewish was a significant reason for writing *Trials of the Diaspora*, a study of English anti-Semitism from medieval times to the present. If you think Bauman's aphorism would not apply to a study bearing the words "A History" in its subtitle, you would be wrong. Julius has his sights set firmly on anti-Semitism today.

The problem of objectivity is particularly acute because the subject of anti-Semitism is now highly politicized. Two or three decades ago there was, broadly speaking, a shared understanding of what counted as anti-Semitism: for example, the hatred of Jews per se; the accusation that Jews secretly conspire worldwide to control the media, the banks and government for their individual and collective advantage and profit; the belief that Jews were responsible for both communism and capitalism; the charge that the Holocaust never happened and was invented by Jews in order to extort money from the Germans. Certainly academic historians have always differed over the precise definition of the term. But today's differences have very little to do with discussions about whether a word coined in the 1870s can be used to describe all varieties of Jew-hatred going back 2,000 years.

These days, when Jew-hatred is publicly identified, it mostly gets called the "new anti-Semitism"—essentially, extreme criticism of Israel said to contain anti-Semitic tropes or to be indistinguishable from anti-Semitism, and commonly called "anti-Zionism." Bitter arguments rage over what constitutes anti-Semitism. Scholarship struggles to hold its own in a field—more accurately, a battleground—dominated by politically motivated columnists and fiercely partisan politicians and public figures. But many who study anti-Semitism fundamentally dispute the existence of a new type of anti-Semitism and reject the notion that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are indistinguishable. Either way, a fundamental change in the discourse has undoubtedly occurred: rare is the discussion about anti-Semitism today that does not center on Israel and Zionism. No one writing about current Jew-hatred could fail to be aware of this. Julius himself acknowledges "the current confusion, as well as much deliberate obfuscation, about what counts as anti-Semitism," and says that disagreements over this "are quite new to anti-Semitism's history." One measure, then, against which Julius's book must be judged is if it mitigates or exacerbates the anti-Semitism wars.

Trials of the Diaspora
A History of Anti-Semitism in England.
By Anthony Julius.
Oxford. 811 pp. $45.

Whether he reluctantly acquired or actively sought it, Anthony Julius has celebrity status. The deputy chairman of the London law firm Mishcon de Reya, Julius was thrust into the public eye in 1996 as the lawyer acting for Diana, Princess of Wales, in her divorce from Prince Charles. Soon enough Julius was back in the limelight when he represented the American Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt in the high-profile and spectacularly unsuccessful libel case brought against her and her British publisher, Penguin Books, by the writer David Irving. Irving claimed that Lipstadt had defamed him as an anti-Semite in her book *Denying the Holocaust*: she had described him as a Holocaust denier. The trial lasted ten weeks, at the end of which the judge ruled that Lipstadt's description of Irving was accurate.

Julius writes in *Trials of the Diaspora* that to

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encounter "Jew-hatred without any disguise or pretence…one has either to be unlucky or else zealous in seeking it out." As a schoolboy and a student of English literature at Cambridge in the 1970s, and then as a lawyer, he learned how English anti-Semitism operates: "by stealth, by indirection, by tacit understandings and limited exclusions." In time, he chose to seek it out, as counsel for the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the official representative body of the British Jewish community, advising Israeli universities threatened with an academic boycott and engaging in public debate on the "version of anti-Zionism" that "has the potential of…sliding into anti-Semitism." Julius acknowledges that these experiences have informed his attitude to the subject and his decision to write this book. He has undertaken a personal mission, albeit one he finds distasteful: "While I acknowledge that anti-Semitism needs to be examined, I do not do so with any relish. It is only because so much anti-Semitic rubbish has now accumulated on England's lawns…that a clean-up of the kind represented by this book has become necessary. But I have derived no benefit, either in self-understanding or education, from the undertaking." Yet however personal the undertaking, the author avers, "the relevant genre within which I have written it has had to be the impersonal work of scholarship." By the last page, there is no doubt that Julius feels he has been through a lot on our behalf: to study anti-Semitic nonsense "is to immerse oneself in muck. Anti-Semitism is a sewer. This is my second book on the subject and I intend it to be my last." (His first, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, appeared in 1995.) These personal revelations might ruffle some readers, but given the fraught and very public nature of debate on the subject, it would have been a mistake to conceal them.

Autobiography completed, Julius embarks on a roller coaster of a journey. After discussing and rather excessively categorizing enmities and defamations in Chapters 1 and 2, he begins the historical narrative in Chapter 3 by examining the radical anti-Semitism of "defamation, expropriation, murder, and expulsion" present in medieval England up to the general expulsion in 1290. This first gave way to literary anti-Semitism, discussed in Chapter 4; then, as Julius shows in a return to historical narrative in Chapter 5, from the time of the readmission in 1655 to the late twentieth century it developed into a "quotidian anti-Semitism of insult and partial exclusion, pervasive but contained." In a further shift of mode, Julius discusses the mentality of modern English anti-Semitism in Chapter 6, before reaching the final two chapters on "anti-Zionisms," which focus mostly on the past ten years. Julius believes that "quotidian anti-Semitism has been waning" but that "in the last decades it has been supplemented by an anti-Semitic anti-Zionism that many English Jews find truly frightening."

By any stretch of the imagination, *Trials of the Diaspora* is very thin history, and whether out of intellectual chutzpah or disdain for the reader, Julius makes no attempt to hide the fact. At the beginning of Chapter 6, just over halfway through the main text, he declares, "So much for the history." Indeed, the history itself relies heavily on secondary sources, many of which Julius uses simply to support his arguments. He barely engages with scholars or researchers who put forward a different point of view. He plays fast and loose with context, using it when it suits him and ignoring it when it might weaken his arguments. In distinctly ahistorical fashion, he leaps back and forth between periods. This is not serious historical scholarship.

Trials of the Diaspora is very thin history, and Julius makes no attempt to hide that.

Equally problematic, but very revealing, is Julius's definition of anti-Semitism. He confidently rejects as false the wider definition of hatred of Jews as "a continuously present, integral aspect of a single 'mentality,' summarily identified as 'Western civilization.'" He continues: "While I have not myself departed from common usage, and therefore write of 'anti-Semitism,' I nonetheless reject most of the term's implications—and all of its claims." This startling statement is followed by an opaque one: "I regard anti-Semitism as a discontinuous, contingent aspect of a number of distinct *mentalités* and milieus, none of which has so dominated the West as to make dissenting perspectives impossible." The fog lifts when Julius writes, "There is no essence of anti-Semitism. It is instead in the irreducible plurality of its forms of existence that 'anti-Semitism' is to be understood and studied."

For three-quarters of the book this definition is hardly relevant, since by Julius's own admission the patterns of English anti-Semitism from the medieval period to the 1960s show considerable continuity. But since Julius believes that the "new anti-Semitism" is the same as the "new anti-Zionism," the usefulness of the definition for the remaining two chapters, which explore "anti-Semitic anti-Zionisms," becomes clear. Essentially, Julius argues that anti-Semitism is so heterogeneous, it's whatever he says it is, thereby justifying the equating of "anti-Zionisms" with anti-Semitism. With all this ground covered before the end of the introduction, it's hard to escape the conclusion that the unmasking of anti-Semitic anti-Zionism in the book's last two chapters is Julius's central, teleological aim, and that the principal purpose of the preceding chapters is to prepare the way. At this point *Trials of the Diaspora* begins to look even less like history and more like the case for the prosecution.

Julius calls English anti-Semitism "a story of an anti-Semitism that shrinks from being named anti-Semitic.… It is not Jew-hatred that we must write of, but Jew-*distrust*.… It is a story of snub and insult, sly whisper and innuendo, deceit and self-deception." But it was not like that before the expulsion. "In medieval England," he writes, "Jews were defamed, their wealth was expropriated, they were killed and injured, they were subjected to discriminatory and humiliating regulation." This "war against the Jews" was largely, but not solely, fueled by blood libel, the false and sensational accusation that "Jews periodically trapped, tortured and then killed Christian boys" and used their blood for ritual purposes. During the hundreds of years Jews were banished from Britain, Jew-hatred was kept alive by literary works that drew heavily on the blood libel theme, such as Chaucer's "The Prioress's Tale" and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

For Julius blood libel was the most significant defamation "Anglo-Jewry was tormented with" during the medieval period, and "it continues to overshadow many Jews' lives today," providing "the governing trope in characterizations of Israel and the Zionist project." Julius argues that the deaths of Palestinian children in the Israel-Palestine conflict are frequently portrayed using blood libel motifs. As evidence that blood libel lives on in twenty-first-century England, he cites two controversial literary works: a nine-line poem by Tom Paulin, "Killed in Crossfire," published in 2001 in the *Observer*, about a Palestinian boy "gunned down by the Zionist SS," and an eight-minute play by Caryl Churchill, *Seven Jewish Children*, performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2009, in which Jewish adults agonize over

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how to explain to Jewish children seven moments in modern Jewish and Israeli history, beginning with the Holocaust and culminating in Israel's 2008–09 attack on Gaza.

It is one thing to allege that these works are anti-Semitic; it is another to say they are responsible for revivifying blood libel accusations in England in the twenty-first century. In fact, neither work contains a blood libel trope. Moreover, one could only impute blood libel references to Paulin's and Churchill's texts by believing that any reference in an artwork to Jews killing children is *ipso facto* anti-Semitic. This is precisely the implication of Julius's argument: every allegation of wrongdoing against, or call to boycott, Jews or the Jewish state "can never be innocent," because it "contains within *it* every previous such call." While it's absolutely right to condemn current accusations made against Jews based on prejudice and bigotry, Julius's proposition is untenable. The child falsely accused of wrongdoing and viciously beaten by abusive parents is not thereby eternally absolved of similar wrongdoing he might later commit.

Having judged blood libel to be present in Paulin's and Churchill's work, Julius then traces a direct and continuous line from the medieval period to the present in order to bolster his argument that anti-Semitism is central to the "new anti-Zionism." But it's only in the final two chapters that he fully defines what he means by anti-Zionism. Julius dates the emergence of the "new anti-Semitism" to the late 1960s and early '70s. Arising "in consequence of the Six Day War," he writes, it "became hegemonic in the 1990s and 2000s." But Julius finds the term unsatisfactory and prefers to speak of "contemporary anti-Zionism," which he defines as an ideological challenge to the Jewish state developed principally by leftists who once supported Israel as a progressive, vulnerable nation populated by Jews seeking shelter after the horrors of the Holocaust. Julius argues that since 1967 the left has viewed Israel as having a powerful military and colonial ambitions in the Palestinian territories it occupies, which makes Israel uniquely responsible for the Middle East conflict.

Julius states that "contemporary anti-Zionism" takes two forms: secular, leftist or post-leftist "new anti-Zionism," on the one hand, and Muslim, Jewish and Christian "confessional anti-Zionisms," on the other. The "new anti-Zionism" and the three confessional anti-Zionisms "are all compromised, though not to the same extent, by their adoption of anti-Semitic language and by their readiness to make common cause with unembarrassed anti-Semites." He then divides the new anti-Zionism into "'*Re-partition' anti-Zionism*" and "'*Liquidation' anti-Zionism*": the first, "also known as the 'two state solution'"; the second, "also known as the 'one state solution.'"

The claim that the two-state solution is anti-Zionist is jaw-dropping. It would apply to the majority of Israeli Jews and the majority of Jews worldwide. Would anyone, other than those who believe that relinquishing even one barren hilltop of the Land of Israel negates Zionism, agree with Julius?

While Julius doesn't hesitate to speak of "anti-Semitic anti-Zionism," he is reluctant to say that all alleged anti-Zionists are actually anti-Semites. To describe the relationship between such people and anti-Semitism, he borrows the notion of the "fellow traveler," someone he defines as "the kind of person ready to overlook or excuse everything that is vicious in the cause he supports, the protagonists he admires." To enforce the point, he draws a direct parallel between fellow travelers of the Soviet Union and what he calls "anti-Semitism's fellow travellers (FTASs)."

There are two major problems with this parallel. First, Julius seems to have narrowed his definition of fellow traveler to suit his purpose. Such a person might indeed have overlooked communism's brutality and repression. But the Soviet or communist fellow traveler was usually someone who openly identified with communism's aims and objectives but was not a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. What, then, are the openly anti-Semitic organizations or movements with which FTASs have such a relationship? Julius doesn't name any, because there aren't any. Nevertheless, he has managed to plant the idea that only a paper-thin wall separates FTASs from outright anti-Semites.

Second, the parallel comes unstuck even more spectacularly when Julius names names. One argument made by FTASs is attributed to Jacqueline Rose, a professor of English literature at Queen Mary, University of London, and a British Jewish academic deeply concerned about Israel-Palestine. Rose writes critically about Zionism and Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, drawing on concepts from psychoanalysis and literary criticism, and is strongly opposed to Israel's presence and policies in the occupied Palestinian territories. After stating that FTASs "encourage a terror-apologism," Julius says FTASs "reject the proposition that setting out to destroy random members of a culture one finds unacceptable is an indefensible project." In other words, people like Rose defend suicide bombings. Julius's proof of this claim is a distorted paraphrase of a passage from *The Last Resistance* (2007), Rose's study of the role of literature in the Zionist imagination. But there is no defense of suicide bombers in the chapter Julius paraphrases (the chapter is an assessment of attempts by several writers to understand the motives of suicide bombers). Elsewhere in the same book, Rose describes suicide bombings as "unacceptable crimes." Moreover, at a public event in London on March 2, 2008, she reiterated her position, saying, "I condemn suicide bombings and do not condone them in any way." Julius also attacks Rose as representative of Jewish anti-Zionism, claiming that she "has written three books with an anti-Zionist perspective" and "affirms the Israel/Nazi analogy." But Rose's books are critical of Zionism, not anti-Zionist, and Julius's claim about her "affirmation" of the Israel/Nazi analogy is a misreading of her work.

Julius's attack on Rose reveals the extent to which he is exercised by Jewish anti-Zionism, despite the fact that he describes the two principal Jewish oppositionist bodies in England, which he alleges are anti-Zionist (Jews for Justice for Palestinians and Independent Jewish Voices), as "marginal to their community" and given to speaking "in sectarian tones." "Marginal" groups, perhaps, but Julius goes to extraordinary lengths to characterize what or who is a Jewish anti-Zionist in England today, but he's well wide of the mark. Independent Jewish Voices, launched in 2007 to "promote the expression of alternative Jewish voices, particularly in respect of the grave situation in the Middle East," which constitutes the proof text for Julius's disquisition on Jewish anti-Zionism, is not an anti-Zionist organization. Among the signatories to the IJV statement of principles (and I am one) are Zionists, non-Zionists and anti-Zionists. The statement neither affirms nor implies an anti-Zionist position. Julius cobbles together quotes and references to describe IJV's opposition to Zionism "in the name of justice," but they do no such thing.

Among the writings of IJV signatories quoted by Julius is an essay by Oxford University philosopher Brian Klug published in this magazine [see "The Myth of the New Anti-Semitism," February 2, 2004]. Julius says that Klug's remark that "Israel is one thing, Jewry another" arises from the "refusal to 'support' Israel." But the remark doesn't imply that. Julius has completely wrenched it

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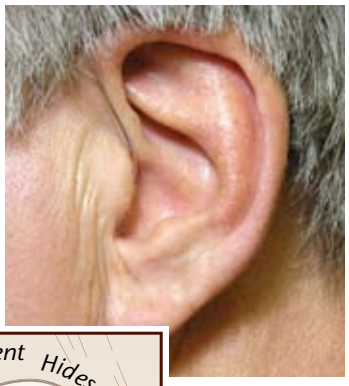

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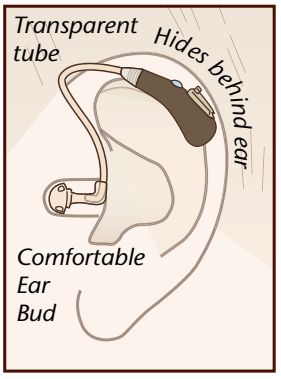

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out of its context, which is an argument about distinguishing between hostility to Israel and hostility to Jews. Klug writes: "To argue that hostility to Israel and hostility to Jews are one and the same thing is to conflate the Jewish state with the Jewish people. In fact, Israel is one thing, Jewry another. Accordingly, anti-Zionism is one thing, anti-Semitism another. They are separate. To say they are separate is not to say that they are never connected. But they are independent variables that can be connected in different ways." Julius's damning judgments of so-called Jewish anti-Zionists do not arise from evidence.

Julius goes on to say that Jewish anti-Zionists "struggle, mostly incompetently, against [anti-Semitism]; many are themselves susceptible to its tropes and turns of phrase. Their perspectives *on* anti-Semitism are defective; their contributions *to* anti-Semitism are significant." For a brief moment, Julius seems to want to see Jewish anti-Zionists as more distanced from the "plainly anti-Semitic" anti-Zionists. But he is instinctively drawn in the other direction. They are all in cahoots: "Such is the overlap, such are the affiliations, such is the extent of the replication," he writes, that the secular and confessional anti-Zionisms occasionally "have the appearance of a single project."

For Julius, Jewish anti-Zionists are not only virtually indistinguishable from anti-Semites; they are also Jews weakened by self-hatred. The latter point emerges from a sentence containing a telling typographical error and a revealing reference. When Julius writes that "Jewish anti-Semites sometimes find themselves viewing Jewish events through the eyes of the anti-Semite," it's clear that he means to begin the sentence "Jewish anti-*Zionists*." His or any editor's failure to catch this slip reveals more than just sloppy editing—the sentence inadvertently expresses Julius's underlying sentiment about so-called "Jewish anti-Zionists." Earlier in the book Julius seems to reject the notion that Jewish self-hatred explains the behavior of Jewish anti-Zionists. But the source for the sentence about "Jewish anti-Semites" is "Self-hatred Among Jews," the principal essay by the renowned American Jewish psychologist Kurt Lewin, published in 1941 in the *Contemporary Jewish Record*. This is clearly an indication that Julius believes Jewish self-hatred explains the behavior of Jewish anti-Zionists.

Criticism of Israel, support for a two-state solution, criticism of Zionist ideology—none of these positions are incompatible with support for the existence of Israel. If anti-Zionism is to have any meaning distinct from these positions, it must fundamentally mean opposition to the Jewish project of a Jewish state in Palestine. Whether this opposition involves "liquidation" of the Jewish state or some other way of superseding that state as it now exists is a matter of complex and lengthy discussion. The crucial point is that even Julius's so-called liquidation anti-Zionism certainly does not, by definition, mean the expulsion, murder or denial of the human rights of Israeli Jews and is therefore not a priori anti-Semitic. Expressions of anti-Zionism that do contain classical anti-Semitic formulations, and those that are made by people whose anti-Semitism is betrayed by their words or actions, are indeed anti-Semitic. But Julius's definition of anti-Zionism runs from the unvarnished anti-Semitic anti-Zionist all the way to the mild critic of Israeli policy. Such a definition is meaningless.

This very big book has a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. At times Julius is insightful and wise, such as when he stresses that while every anti-Semite is an enemy of the Jews, not every enemy of the Jews is an anti-Semite, or when he writes that "what is being said *about* Jews will not always reflect what is being done *to* Jews." But for the most part, *Trials of the Diaspora* is marred by the relentless pursuit and prosecution of alleged "anti-Semitic anti-Zionists." By misreading Jewish critics of Israel, Julius acts as a propagandist for Israel. He is dismissive of Islamophobia because he seems to believe that it is used to malevolently downplay anti-Semitism. His criticisms of leftist critics of Israel are beyond reason. He indulges in facile accusations of anti-Semitism against the *Guardian* and the BBC. And fatal to his aims, he casts his anti-Zionist net so wide that it even snares some Zionists. If IJV is anti-Zionist, then so is prominent IJV member Lady Ellen Dahrendorf, former chair of the avowedly Zionist New Israel Fund, a British charity with which she is still closely associated. Then there's Oxford University musicologist Jeremy Montagu, the former president of London's West Central Liberal Synagogue, who writes repeatedly of his love and support for Israel in *A Time to Speak Out: Independent Jewish Voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish Identity*, a collection of essays written almost entirely by IJV signatories, Montagu included.

Julius acknowledges that anti-Semitism and Israel have become inextricably linked, but he does not subject this connection to rigorous, objective analysis. Instead, he accepts without question the central notion of the "new anti-Semitism": that Israel is the "Jew among the nations." This phrase posits an unsustainable equivalence between the powerless, vulnerable diaspora Jew and the state of Israel. Moreover, it dilutes the allegation of anti-Semitism. To warrant the charge, it is sufficient for someone to hold any view ranging from criticism of the policies of the current Israeli government to denial that Israel has the right to exist, without having to subscribe to any of the beliefs historians have traditionally regarded as constituting an anti-Semitic worldview. This is a fundamental redefinition of the term "anti-Semitism" for political purposes, one consequence of which is that if almost everything is anti-Semitic, then nothing is. The word is rendered useless. *Trials of the Diaspora* significantly exacerbates the anti-Semitism wars. It does nothing to mitigate them.

If Julius begins with a confident presentation of his Jewish credentials for writing the book, in the final pages he returns, in a more defensive mood, to the question of Jews writing about anti-Semitism. He believes that "listening to Jews on the subject of anti-Semitism is not popular.… Jews are too quick, it is often suggested, to cry anti-Semitism…they cannot be 'objective'; they overestimate the threat to Israel." Naturally, he rejects these arguments. Jews, he believes, "have a strong claim to be arbiters on questions of anti-Semitism. But it is not the best claim. *That* claim can only be made by those Jews *and* non-Jews whose conclusions are informed by fair-mindedness, an ability to give proper weight to the relevant evidence, and a thorough understanding of the character and history of anti-Semitism." Regrettably, *Trials of the Diaspora* fails to pass this very reasonable test. Far from cleaning up the lawns of England's green and pleasant land, Julius has littered them with more rubbish.

Of course, many delighted readers will see in this book a robust defense of Israel, a rebuke to its critics and an unsparing exposé of Muslim and Christian anti-Semitic anti-Zionism. One booster is Harold Bloom, who reinforced the equation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism in a fawning and incoherent review of Julius's book in *The New York Times Book Review*. But for anyone who cares about the serious study of contemporary anti-Semitism, *Trials of the Diaspora* is a disaster, since on the basis of its length, vaulting ambition, celebrity author and prestigious press it might gain the undeserved reputation of being a standard work. Julius has tried to be both bird and ornithologist and has failed. A touch of Zygmunt Bauman's humility and circumspection would have stood him in good stead. ■

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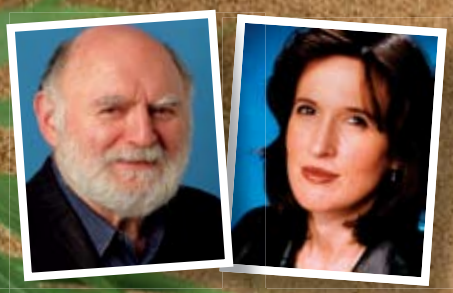

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Anti-

by J.M. TYREE

"It's not the jokes," Eddie Waters tells a group of aspiring comedians in Trevor Griffiths's classic play *Comedians* (1975). "It's not the jokes. It's what lies behind 'em.… When a joke bases itself upon a distortion…and gives the lie to the truth so as to win a laugh and stay in favor, we've moved away from a comic art and into the world of 'entertainment' and slick success." From the misogynist, nihilist novels of Michel Houellebecq to randy popcorn films like *The Hangover* and *The Ugly Truth*, we have recently seen the flowering of a certain strain of humor: noxious, sexist and juvenile, this type of comedy sets itself up as an antisocial fun-zone free from the censure of political correctness, an unsafe space where guys can finally tell the truth about how things really are instead of mouthing the platitudes of gender equality expected of males in mixed company. Reveling in the unacceptable is confused with genuine humor, then further confused with truth-telling in the face of a supposedly dominant feminized culture. There can be no question of the mass appeal here, an analogue in comedy writing to the Tea Party movement, which panders to whatever percentage of white males feel disenfranchised by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. These works provide a solace similar to that proffered by Super Bowl ads like this year's incendiary spot "Man's Last Stand," for the Dodge Charger, which recommended the hot rod as the appropriate reward for any man enduring the soul-killing cheerlessness of a heterosexual relationship. "I will say yes when you want me to say yes," the voiceover intones. "I will carry your lip balm," but "I will drive the car I want to drive." Anyone who complains is no fun and no fair.

In *Comedians*, Eddie Waters offers his students an alternative:

> A real comedian—that's a daring man. He *dares* to see what his listeners shy away from, fear to express. And what he sees is a sort of truth about people, and about their situation, about what hurts or terrifies them, about what's hard, above all, about what they *want*. A joke relieves the tension, says the unsayable, any joke pretty well. But a true joke, a comedian's joke, has to do more than release tension, it has to *liberate* the will and the desire, it has to *change the situation*.

The Ask
By Sam Lipsyte
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 296 pp. $25.

Many of our best contemporary comic writers seem to have intuited Waters's lesson. From television shows like *The Office* and HBO's *Eastbound & Down* to the stories of George Saunders, Junot Díaz and David Foster Wallace, these writers, like their less able peers, use male narcissism as the foil for their jokes. Yet these writers are neither chauvinists nor nihilists; their depiction of men being men can be vicious, but it is never static or canned. Saunders, Díaz and Wallace are celebrated not only because they broach the unsayable but also because, despite their eagerness to transgress, their work is fundamentally humane.

Sam Lipsyte's fiction oscillates between these comic modes. In the four books he has published in the past decade, readers have witnessed an ongoing war in Lipsyte's comedy between empathy and nastiness. He has skewered the afflictions and affectations of his male protagonists to devastating effect, but he is sometimes unable to generate the escape velocity required to see a world beyond his narrators' self-absorption. *Home Land* (2004) was a decisive victory for empathy, and for Lipsyte's artistry. His latest novel, *The Ask*, feels disordered and inchoate by comparison. It's a retreat by a nonpareil comic stylist into the pure but flat art of the vile.

Lipsyte published his first book, a small-press short story collection, *Venus Drive*, in 2000. Its best pieces mix their shocks with a startling pathos, an effect that is similar to one employed by John Cassavetes in the film *Faces*, in which hilariously madcap human degradation becomes frightening and at times nearly tragic. In Lipsyte's "Cremains," the narrator inherits his deceased mother's apartment, where he spends his days playing handyman and confidante to the lonely elderly women in the building. He also inherits his mom's cancer stash of morphine and finds himself mainlining with a mixture of narcotics and his mother's ashes. "Is that the morphine, or is that my mother?" he asks. "Something is setting beautiful fires up and down my spine." In the final pages of *Venus Drive*, the story "Less Tar" ends with this remarkable *cri de coeur*: "I Love You, I Love You, Let's Make it Work, I Love You So Much, Let's Not Ever Ever Quit." It's understood that the characters in question will almost certainly fail, but their hopes and dreams (or, if one prefers, their necessary illusions) remain an active force in the narrative.

Lipsyte's first novel, *The Subject Steve*, about a dot-com ad man diagnosed with a vague but dangerous disease, premiered on September 10, 2001. In the "smoked-glass murk of corporate life" portrayed in the novel, one of the slogans generated by the narrator is the priceless "How Did You Like Tomorrow?" (*Venus Drive*'s "My Life, For Promotional Use Only" features the efforts of a design team to create a *White Noise*–like "totalizing space for commerce and dialogue.") *The Subject Steve* shares the worst flaw of *The Ask*—chipboard characters who serve the jokes in an extraordinary series of one-liners, acid-bath sketches and witty set pieces that add up to something less than a novel. Like *The Ask*, it reads like a short story that has been fattened up to fill a full-size book or, were it expanded further, could be a television sitcom starring a cranky male protagonist. Still, Lipsyte's ability to generate a densely impacted poetry of despair is remarkable. In *The Subject Steve*, one character self-defines in a tight narrative arc of four words: "Smack, whiskey, alimony, syph."

Lipsyte's deservedly lauded follow-up, *Home Land*, was a carnival ride of pity and terror in epistolary form. Published first in Britain and later imported to the States in paperback, the book comprises a series of outrageously funny and poignant letters sent to a high school bulletin by a nonplussed alum who "did not pan out," Lewis Miner ("aka Teabag"), a depressed and onanistic antihero with a decidedly creepy sexual nostalgia for the chic leg warmers and white tube socks of the Reagan era.

Home Land is a novel of deep and unexpected compassion. In the final chapter, "The Erasing Angel," Miner writes that "once more I stuff my heart into the firing tube of language, loft it into the void." Yes, the novel documents the life of a man who likens the way he feels to "bathing at knifepoint in the phlegm of the dead," and whose pipe dream for a self-help book is titled *The Seven Habits of Highly Disappointed People*. Yet heartbreak pervades Miner's darkness—or, if not exactly heartbreak, then at least, as one chapter title has it, "A Sort of Forlorn Smirk." Of his high

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school principal, Miner writes, "Some of him is made of charm. Even the charmless parts, I believe, were acquired in provinces of real human pain." When an enraged former classmate writes back to Miner after reading his missives to his school newsletter, asking whether he has "ever traveled, ever loved, ever experienced excitement, ever done anything kind for anyone," the answers, behind all of his dodges and sick jokes, are yes, yes, yes and yes. So, asks Miner, "do I qualify as human yet?"

This note of mournful fellow-feeling descends at intervals in *The Ask*, such as when a minor character reveals that the delusion that keeps him going as an immigrant ("my lie for myself," he calls it) is that "in America, things can be okay." Mostly, however, the novel tries its best to turn the reader off. *The Ask*'s assault on our more delicate sensibilities begins with its very first lines, with the grandiose political commentary of Horace, an office temp who declares:

> Our republic's whoremaster days were through. Whither that frost-nerved, diamond-fanged hustler who'd stormed Normandy, dick-smacked the Soviets, turned out such firm emerging market flesh?

Milo Burke, the novel's narrator and anti-hero, counters: "That's a pretty sexist way to frame a discussion of America's decline, don't you think?" This conversation takes place on the job at the development office of a mediocre New York City university. For Milo, it's "a good shitty job." He wastes his days ("I wasn't developing") entertaining sexual fantasies about his female supervisor. Having formerly considered himself a painter, Milo is now scaling back on his life's ambitions after getting married (to Maura) and having a kid (Bernie). Soon into the novel, Milo is dismissed from his post for mocking a female student as an "arrogant, talentless, daddy-damaged waif." Despite his disclaimer that his mother was a second-wave feminist, Milo's outburst is deemed hate speech.

"You could say I had experienced some technical difficulties," Milo says of his unemployment. Here he joins a long line of listless Lipsyte protagonists on the outs with their jobs, their love lives and their national culture after brief stints as artists of some kind and subsequent botched attempts to survive in the corporate world. Milo drifts, at one point attempting to join the deck-building business of an acquaintance whose true ambition is to create a reality TV program conjoining the food and true crime genres in a show called *Dead Man Dining* (condemned prisoners would be fed their last meal by a gourmet chef). Milo spirals downward into a stay-at-home-dad hell involving, among other things, a disastrous attempt to pick up the mother of one of his son's classmates. Readers of *Home Land* will note the return of authorial commentary about TV, pop culture, porn and tube socks. Like *Home Land*'s Lewis Miner, Milo is intentionally made to look ridiculous. But the universe of *The Ask* lacks an essential element of *Home Land*—at the subsentence level, it's missing something that could be called the charm quark. In this novel, Lipsyte attempts the impossible, a novel that is anti-everything.

As his marriage crumbles—Maura leaves Milo for a graphic designer—the development office of Mediocre University suddenly asks Milo to return. A potential gold-mine donor, Purdy, has requested that his old college chum Milo be his liaison during the process of an "ask"—that is, a proposed large-scale charitable donation, also used as a noun to describe the would-be donor (read: sucker). Purdy is willing to make a massive donation, but he also has personal problems that require Milo's help. His illegitimate son, Don, is a crazed veteran who has returned from Iraq (and central casting) without his legs. Don regularly sends the daddy who damaged him notes that range from bizarre to extortionate. Purdy wants Milo to act as bagman for Don's hush money, promising the moon in return for his services. Although Lipsyte's treatment of combat trauma is severely limited by caricature, the last paragraphs of *The Ask* contain a final, honest shock about Don that is better left undisclosed, one that obliterates any lingering sense of hope. Why do we expect hope from fiction, or from life? That is what the novel "asks" the reader.

© ROBERT REYNOLDS
Sam Lipsyte

What does a reader ask of a novel? Nobody in the universe proposed by *The Ask* will grow up, become a fundamentally better person, have a life-changing epiphany, find lasting love or "only connect" in the manner recommended by E.M. Forster. Hackneyed expressions of these tropes deserve our ridicule, but this novel is inordinately unforgiving and cold, especially compared with *Home Land*. Like almost all of Lipsyte's work, it depicts hideous men at their most hideous. Its female characters, meanwhile, are designed to play against stereotypes, but this effect is undermined by their lack of depth, psychological or otherwise. Maura is forgotten the moment she leaves the page. The love interests in Lipsyte's fiction tend to represent missed opportunities or failed attempts to become decent; eventually they decide they've had enough of his narrators and move on. Lipsyte intends this as a critique of male narcissism, but it also effectively removes women from the orbit of the story. In *The Subject Steve*, the ex, Maryse, has a name not very different from Maura, and she goes equally AWOL. In *Home Land*, the narrator's fiancée, Gwendolyn, has "decamped." Lipsyte kindles real human emotion in his depiction of Milo's gay mom, Claudia, a no-nonsense woman self-actualizing after the debacle of her marriage, but she remains peripheral. These aren't Chekhovian characters with rich interior lives, and, to be fair, that's not the point. But even in the male-dominated narrative world of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, the psychological complexity of Joelle Van Dyne (*aka* "Madame Psychosis") remains vital to the story. Lipsyte never ventures beyond the myopic minds of his eloquently damaged male narrators.

The Ask is meant to be provocative and intentionally unacceptable. Part of the novel's strategy is to mock the conventions of mainstream literary fiction by displaying overt contempt for the notion of a likable protagonist who, besieged by circumstances, becomes embroiled in conflict, searches for love and meaning, and finally discovers much about himself and the world. Nobody in *The Ask* is likable except Claudia and the oddly wonderful child, Bernie. But the novel anticipates and deflects this objection. "I'm not very likable, am I?" Milo asks his

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supervisor. "If I were the protagonist of a book or a movie, it would be hard to like me, to identify with me, right?" "You're likable enough," says his boss, echoing Barack Obama's campaign retort to Hillary Clinton. It's a tactic drawn from the arsenal of metafiction that fails without the firepower of genuine experimentalism; *The Ask* is, in the end, not a satirical frolic at the expense of narrative structure but a story about what are supposed to be actual human beings.

"What the hell is wrong with me?" asks one of the disaffected narrators in *Venus Drive*. In Lipsyte's work, the question is metonymous. What's wrong with men? What's the matter with America? In one scene in *The Ask*, Maura returns home and suggests that she watch a cheesy romantic movie on television while Milo simultaneously masturbates to office-themed Internet pornography at the other end of the couch. The episode auditions as a metaphor for the implosion of their marriage in addition to depicting the definitively disconnected outlets for male and female fantasy in mass culture. Yet the couch episode doesn't live as fiction because one never learns enough about Maura to understand why she wants this encounter to occur or what it might mean to her. She is, rather, a cipher who stands for the obliteration of the dream of human contact.

The take-it-or-leave-it relish of Lipsyte's work resides in its diligent refusal to scrub up and play nice. The narrator of "Cremains" keeps a jokey postcard from an ex-girlfriend up on the fridge as "a testament to what's not really funny." Laughing at what's not really funny—or, as a corollary, laughing at what's really not funny—could be Lipsyte's credo. Dredging up toxic sludge from the bottom of the private or public well, airing the dirty laundry before it is washed and spun—these are some of comedy's tasks.

The Ask, although often wickedly funny and written in prose of a startling clarity, lacks the empathy of *Home Land*. Its sorrow is angrier, more depressive and less moving. Lipsyte's sense of a yearning, failed connection has been smothered by a jaded and implacable misanthropy. The core problem of comic writing is that either the joke serves the characters or the characters serve the joke. What's missing from *The Ask* is *Home Land*'s human factor, its breaking heart.

It may seem like an old-fashioned question, but it is one worth asking about *The Ask*: can we, over the course of reading a novel, make do entirely without characters we grow to care for? By the end of *The Ask*, Milo shows some signs of life—he loses his wife but he still has his son and his painting, which he has demoted, in genuine humility, to the status of hobby. The most honest thing he can say about himself is that he's "still bitter, was bitter about the bitterness." He's "digging in for the long night of here."

At its most rigorous, Lipsyte's work resembles a contemporary basement diatribe version of *Notes From Underground*; the narrator's point of view is vivisected, not endorsed. Dostoyevsky's "sick man" brags about his abominable behavior but cannot fully persuade himself to "become spiteful." It is possible for him to be "genuinely touched," despite all appearances to the contrary. Lipsyte's successful narrators share this quality, one that is largely missing from Milo Burke.

Is the fundamental problem plaguing *The Ask* one that Milo would term a "technical difficulty," an all-enveloping first-person narrative that traps the reader inside the suffocating constraints of the very narcissism it mocks? In *Home Land*, Lipsyte used a similar narrative technique to great effect, finding plenty of emotional breathing room and discovering unexpected poignancy hidden among unpalatable truths. *The Ask* focuses more exclusively on what's wrong, both with Milo Burke and with what he calls "dead America." The resulting novel is slight, although its premise—a comedy that rejects fun—is memorable.

David Foster Wallace's sketches in *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* frame their male subjects through a doubly distancing lens: the men's monologues are fractured by an interviewer, and the title of the book hints at a refreshing assertion of overt sexual politics. These strategies might sound didactic, but they don't spoil the humor of the book, nor do they blunt the force of the trauma depicted within its stories. It seems possible that a framing device, such as the epistolary format of *Home Land* or another formal tactic even more outlandish and disjunctive, could have served Lipsyte's intentions better than the novel-length monologue that is *The Ask*. In a way, the book is too traditional. *The Ask* confines readers entirely to Milo Burke's head, a place that isn't interesting enough to warrant an extended stay. ■

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Signal Corps officers at the SIGSALY Paris Terminal, circa 1944

Robot Rock

by J. GABRIEL BOYLAN

Earlier this year Israel unveiled its latest weapon, a device called the Thunder Generator. Designed for crowd control and developed by PDT Agro, a firm that manufactures sonic instruments for scaring birds from crops, the Thunder Generator projects a sonic boom so piercing that it may cause permanent injury or death to anyone within ten meters. The Thunder Generator does not emit music, but the aggressive pitch of its sonic disturbance has a lot in common with military uses of music—and I don't mean the brassy marches of John Philip Sousa. During the 1989 invasion of Panama, US forces used an ear-splitting barrage of Led Zeppelin and Martha Reeves and

How to Wreck a Nice Beach
The Vocoder From World War II to Hip-Hop: The Machine Speaks.
By Dave Tompkins.
Melville House/Stop Smiling. 335 pp. $35.

J. Gabriel Boylan is a music and arts writer.

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the Vandellas to drive Manuel Noriega from his redoubt in the Vatican Embassy. Several years ago in Iraq, during the assault on Falluja, US Marines bombarded insurgents with, among other things, blasts of heavy metal.

What if the Thunder Generator's booms were made into a beat? How would it sound on a record? Would it be funky? That the Thunder Generator would ever be used to make tail feathers shake is unlikely, but in the history of music there are many cases of invention and accident resulting in the genesis of new sounds. The theremin was the fruit of Soviet government research conducted in the 1920s on proximity sensors, instruments that could gauge the distance of objects without touching them. It was a scientific tool, and when it came to be used musically people thought only to manipulate it to approximate the human voice, or to play mostly classical tunes. Yet even an instrument as marginal as the theremin is known to most of us: it's the sound of spook in horror movies, the trebly warble in "Good Vibrations."

Somehow more unlikely and yet more influential is the vocoder, whose history is told in Dave Tompkins's fascinating debut book, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*. Developed in the 1920s by Bell Labs as a device for cramming phone conversations into the transatlantic cable, the vocoder was eventually engineered into a tool for encoding and deciphering top-secret military communications. A "massive walk-in closet of cryptology," Tompkins writes, the vocoder divided the human voice into ten constituent frequencies before transmission. The frequencies were scrambled with the aid of a pair of turntables playing sixteen-inch custom-made albums of "thermal noise in reverse, a randomized shush, backwards masked inside out." At the receiving end those ten frequencies were recombined (using an identical set of vinyl records). The turntables had to be synched precisely to the messages. When the message had been decoded and played back through the curiously altered voice of the vocoder, both sets of records were destroyed. The vocoded sound was something resembling the human voice, but in the coding process strange noises crept in, and the sound became a kind of warped version of language.

You have heard the progeny of the vocoder, even if you don't know what it is. It's in the processed vocal chorus of Lady Gaga's dance-pop and the surreptitious pitch correction done in-studio for the latest *American Idol* winner who can't quite hit all those notes. Perhaps you've heard it in the steely processing on Kraftwerk's "Autobahn," the spaced-out funk of Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock" or the buzzy low-rider anthem of Roger Troutman on Zapp's "More Bounce to the Ounce." Surely you've heard the talk box in Peter Frampton's many megahits and the songs of Jeff Beck and Stevie Wonder. If you haven't, what the talk box does is broadcast the amplified sound of a guitar or synthesizer into the mouth through a tube clenched tight by the teeth. The musician molds the sound by lip-synching or varying the shape of the mouth and letting it wash over the mic.

The vocoder is stranger. It masks the human voice in a stratum of electronic sound, making it at times unrecognizable or indecipherable and at other times clear, cold and concise in ways the unadulterated human voice could never be. What interests Tompkins is not only the dissociation of vocal qualities from the human voice but also how human voices can speak through that dissociation, through a displacement that yields something more than voices can normally achieve. The title of Tompkins's book—a vocoded transmutation of "how to recognize speech"—is a symbol of the generative and destructive capabilities of the device. Bambaataa calls the vocoder "deep crazy supernatural bugged out funk stuff." Many of the musicians who turn up in Tompkins's book are equally reverent about the vocoder's powers of distortion and transcendence. This shouldn't be a surprise. Whether it's the improvised nonsense syllables of scat, the vocal tics of doo-wop or the preponderance of slang and accent in the blues, country and rock, pop musicians have long been interested in reshaping the human voice. With the vocoder, we linger until human voices shake us, and we sound, but not like voices that are quite human any longer.

The Voder, as the vocoder was initially named, was showcased at the 1939 World's Fair, but because of rapid advances in telephone technology it became a novelty item marketed to Hollywood studios, which used it to generate the helium voices of cartoons. Despite its shortcomings in accurately reproducing speech (during testing, Tompkins says, "a simple 'yes' was transmuted into the word 'peanuts'"), the Voder was a highly prized and classified piece of technology during World War II. Outfitted with advanced coding technology (Pulse Code Modulation, or PCM), the Voder was rechristened SIGSALY (an acronym that means nothing). SIGSALY units were set up in London, Washington, a wine cellar in Algiers and elsewhere across the European and Pacific theaters. Tompkins writes:

> Installed across the globe from 1943 to 1946, these fifty-five-ton phone scramblers would be used for D-Day, the Allied invasion of Germany, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the "dismemberment of the surrender instrument"—allowing Roosevelt, Truman, Churchill and Eisenhower to discuss the world's fate with voices they barely recognized, voices not human but polite artificial replicas of speech rendered from digital pulses 20 milliseconds in length.

Vocoder technology advanced after the war (its engineers still hoped to improve telecommunications abilities), and it was again adapted by Hollywood, especially to help voice robots and spacemen in sci-fi flicks. It also came under the scrutiny of a new generation of engineers, who sought to improve the mechanism but also wrestled with what it meant to perfect machine sounds into human speech. The concern was whether the vocoder, which treats any sound as though it were speech, makes a sound intelligible or merely distorts it. What is the power of human intelligibility, the meaning of the recordings of our voices, of our bodies against the technological remnants and divergences they produce? What is the value of sound against that of noise?

Scientists and rappers alike approach the vocoder as something other than a mere piece of technology or a secure way of transmitting sensitive speech over great distances. It is an instrument through which the human spirit can communicate a new kind of sonic language; Tompkins says that using it is no different from exploiting the advantages and quirks of the saxophone or the violin. He introduces us to the music of the vocoder via "Pack Jam," a minor hit by the Jonzun Crew, a quartet in powdered wigs whose vocoded raps set Miami on fire in the summer of 1983. Michael Jonzun and his onetime keyboardist, Bill Sebastian, designed a hybrid synthesizer/vocoder called the Outer Visual Communicator, or OVC, a sixteen-foot hexagonal plexiglass monster Sebastian built at MIT. (Jonzun and Sebastian would go on to develop data-compression technology for satellite use.)

For Jonzun the vocoder doesn't delimit the human voice (as Auto-Tune, in large part, does) but instead liberates it from the bonds of technology:

> When somebody plays Pac-Man, you're playing a game where everything you do is structured according to somebody else's rules. With the OVC, you create your own environments with your own rules. The OVC

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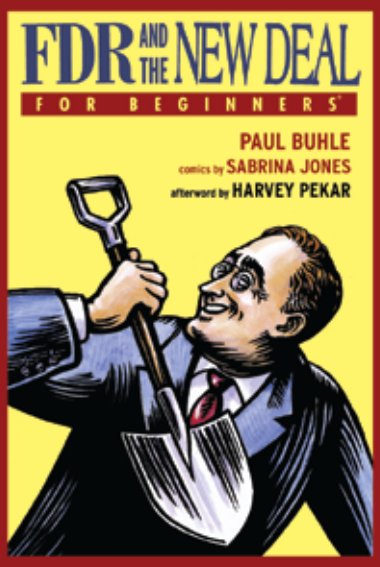

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> is creating an experience rather than playing a game.... There's a fundamental cultural conflict between the two attitudes. It's mind control. Of all the things you could do with your life that they could focus you on something that has such a limited set of possibilities. You're just moving a cursor up, down, left or right. In a maze. Squares are artificial.

Jonzun's notion that a giant blinking electronic super-synthesizer/vocoder is the antithesis of the artificial is difficult to parse. What is certain is that the OVC was used in Sun Ra concerts and is currently disintegrating in the backyard of Sebastian's Cape Cod home.

Tompkins covers all the bases: Whodini, Man Parrish (who started out on a vocoder once used by ELO), Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, the Fearless Four, Bambaataa and LA's notorious "freak parties" with the Egyptian Lover, Uncle Jamm and a very young Ice-T all vibing to the vocoder. There is an interlude about the young Tompkins listening to underground hip-hop in North Carolina.

One of Tompkins's more stirring stories is about Rik Davis, a Vietnam vet who, with his friend Juan Atkins as Cybotron, defined the sound of Detroit techno. Davis was a poor, nerdy square peg who says he enlisted with the Marines at 17 as much to escape the ghetto as "to sail the Seven Seas with Captain Sinbad." He landed in serious combat: "We did ops that don't exist. Ops that weren't allowed to exist." Davis returned from the war a hippie in fatigues; he was the "black kid asking for Tangerine Dream" at record shops, a misfit carrying a heavy psychological load. Inspired by the Italian prog-rock musicians Goblin, who specialized in soundtracks for horror films like Dario Argento's *Suspiria*, he and Atkins began to construct spooky soundscapes drenched in synths and accompanied by throbbing, insistent beats, which Tompkins suggests are rooted in Davis's memories of the whoosh and chop of helicopter blades. One night Atkins found Davis guarding a recording session with an assault rifle. The chorus to one of the group's first tracks is "I don't want to kill you but I have to." Weapons of war turned into dance jams, and they are indeed funky.

Afrika Bambaataa is one of several wacked-out Virgils who guide Tompkins by the hand through the underworlds of pop music, where the vocoder washes in and out of genres, on and off the radio, in and out of dance clubs. There are moments when Tompkins's guides are unsure of his devotion to the vocoder or simply fail to understand why anyone would take an interest in it. At the end of the book Tompkins is tagging along with Rammellzee, a true eccentric who collaborated with Jean-Michel Basquiat on the seminal ten-minute early hip-hop tune "Beat Bop." At first Rammellzee is guarded and defensive, and threatens to throw Tompkins from a roof, but he ultimately warms to the writer and divulges the sonic secrets of the vocoder. By far the most fascinating character in the book, Rammellzee offers an endless patter of maxims that meld mathematics, conspiracy theory and freaky meditations: "The integer is a nation by itself. The function leads you on into the future, without it you have no control." "Never listen to poets who are astrophysicists. You may not like what you find."

Readers interested in the technical aspects of the vocoder may feel shortchanged by Tompkins's account of the device, and especially its later incarnations as different types of portable synthesizers. When Tompkins describes the engineering behind the machine, he can sound more baffling than Rammellzee. Still, Tompkins's book achieves what the best music writing does—it opens doors, tears off tarps and digs in the dirt to reveal the stunning variety and potential in popular music. Those expecting the straight story about the music may be put off by Tompkins's poetics. In explaining the song "Ode to Perfume" by Holger Czukay of Can, Tompkins gets downright expressionistic:

> Effluvia, such a pretty word for drop-dead noxious. Vocoders and noses go together like code and cold. When a human impersonates a vocoder, the nose shrugs and we become hypochondriacs. The ears tell the brain that the voice has caught a cold and the brain goes along with it, the gullible kid brother.

Is it live, or is it thermal noise in reverse?

Listening to music made with vocoders and talk boxes while reading *How to Wreck a Nice Beach* helps to make Tompkins's mad-professor style more legible and to reveal the incredibly strange, unsettling and amazing ways artists have used the gadget. For a piece of equipment so heavily derided for never quite being able to do what it was supposed to do—transmit the human voice through the wire—it is heartening to know how many human voices found that they could only speak, or spoke best, through the vocoder, even if sometimes it's tough to tell the difference between "yes" and "peanut." ■

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Puzzle No. 1591

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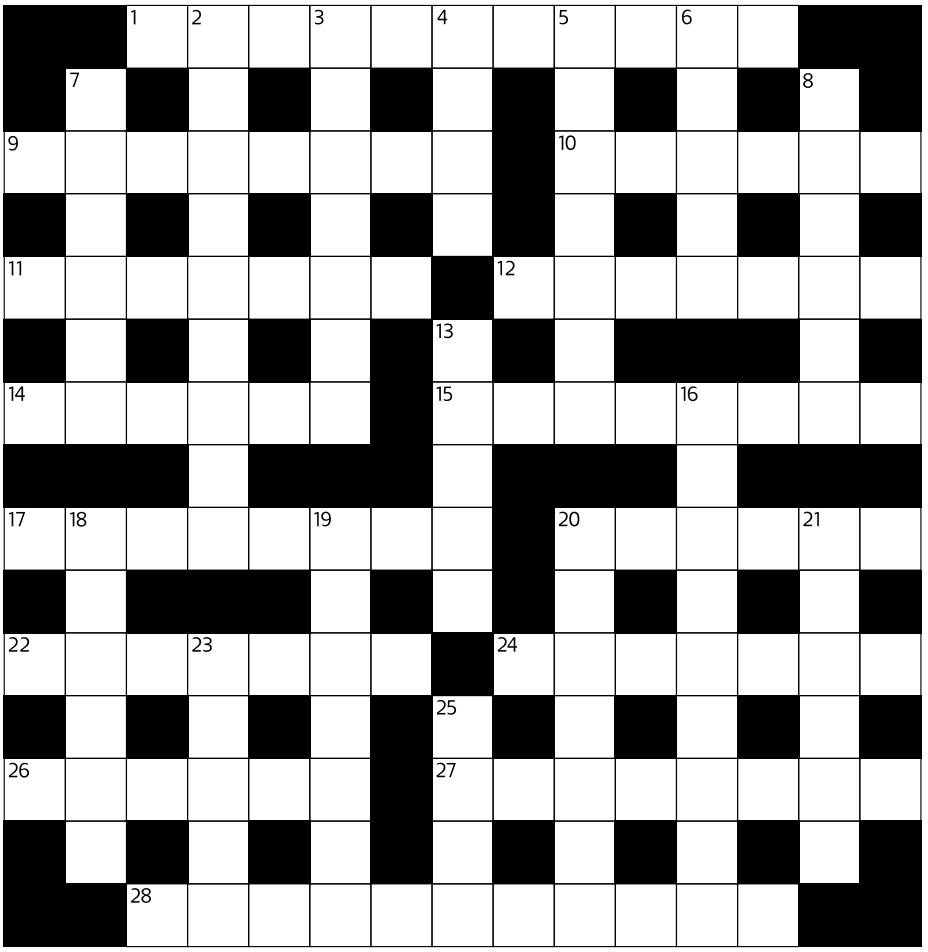

ACROSS

1 and **20** across If this were so, one of them might be chow time. (5,3,3,3,3)

9 Not a wrestling throw—it's a more genteel game. (4,4)

10 If you have to, something may have been mislaid in the shuffle. (6)

11 Detains the alternative possibility? (7)

12 There's a point to what might be associated with an artist. (7)

14 An opening in a small part of the school associated with marine life? (6)

15 A petty annoyance, if Beatle-arranged. (8)

17 Tend to be wary? (4,4)

20 See 1

22 See 13 down

24 Run by a poor navigator? (7)

26 The Mikado's cloth might prove false. (6)

27 Someone might read 3 to try and calm one. (8)

28 Not what Mae West intended for her invitees, though the brash are more likely to get theirs. (11)

DOWN

2 and **25** down A bad poet gave blues a first presentation, as a matter of course. (9,4)

3 Implying Brazilians are noted for their diplomacy, although it could be a disturbing incident. (4,3)

4 and **8** In the publishing business, do they offer this for protection? (You might, before going out, if you're worried about a suit.) (4,6)

5 Closely related to Gothic character? (7)

6 Put two and two together. (5)

7 The flower of Cadiz, in Niagara now. (6)

8 See 4 down

13 and **22** across One of the things the detective is, only? (One might not like to be such an accessory.) (5,3,4)

16 See? (9)

18 The city, as it should be about that time. (6)

19 Grow together with the current island combination. (7)

20 Tipsy with drink? That's what some Britishers get in the afternoon! (4,3)

21 The plant's yearly report, obviously. (6)

23 Some distance to travel in the north central region. (5)

25 See 2 down

For another opinion on Clue 9, Puzzle No. 1588, see the Letters page.

This puzzle originally appeared in the June 28, 1975, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1590

	C	H	A	M	P	A	T	T	H	E	B	I	T	
O		A		O		V		E		N		M		H
F	O	R	T	U	N	E		A	G	R	I	P	P	A
F		R		S		N		C		O		L		R
T	A	I	L	I	N	G		H	U	B	B	A	R	D
H		E		N		E		E		E		N		T
E	N	S	I	G	N	S		R	I	S	O	T	T	O
S														S
U	N	F	I	L	E	D		L	O	C	K	J	A	W
B		O		A		R		O		A		O		A
J	E	R	I	C	H	O		C	O	R	O	N	A	L
E		W		O		P		A		I		E		L
C	H	A	N	N	E	L		T	A	B	A	S	C	O
T		R		I		E		E		O		E		W
	E	D	U	C	A	T	E	D	G	U	E	S	S	

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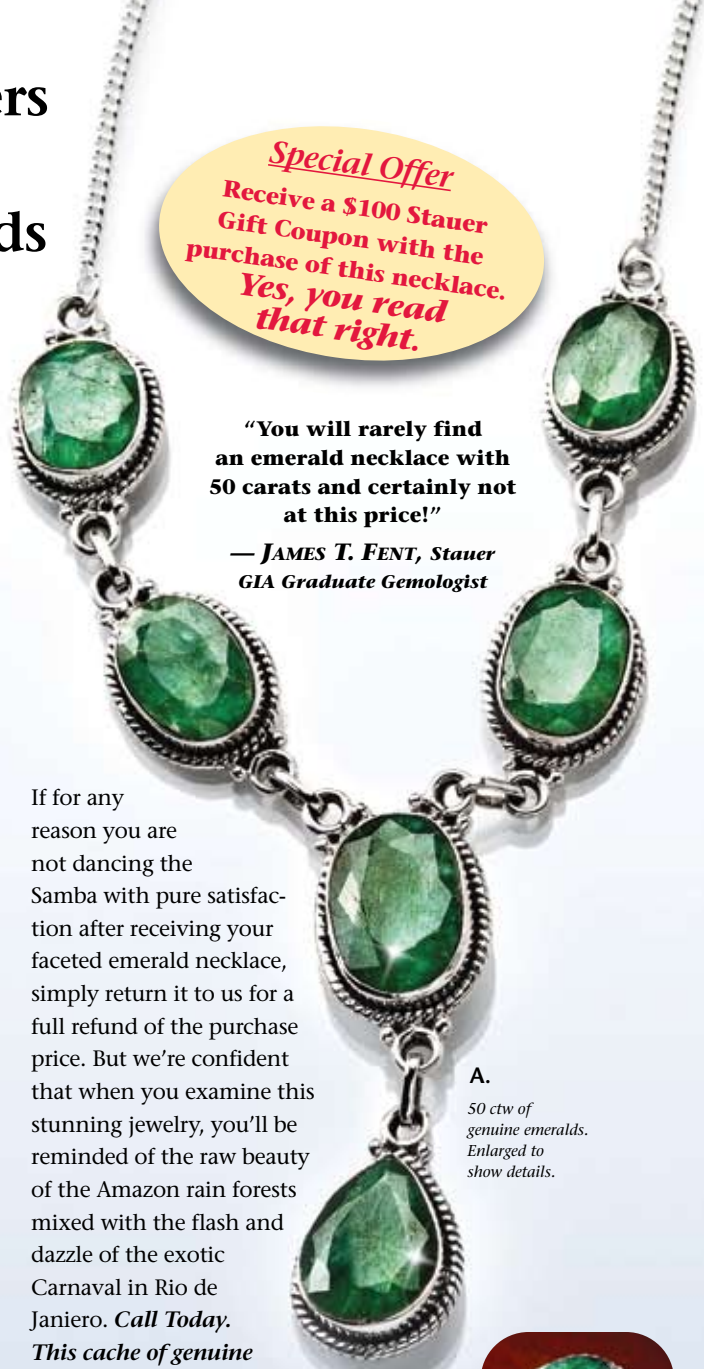

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C.

D.

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